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Oregon Sol; OR, NICK WHIFFLES'S BOY SPY.

BY CAPT. J. F. C. ADAMS.

CHAPTER I.

A "CONDEMNED DIFFIKILTY."

"WHEN a man has got to say yes or no, and can't for his life make up his mind which he oughter say, then I allow he's in a condemned diffikilty; but, when you're in such a kentry as this, where the varmints are all around you, it's the best plan to be 'spicious of 'em all."

Thus spoke Nick Whiffles, with the old smile lighting up his honest, homely countenance, in reply to a remark of his friend Oregon Sol, a brother trapper, as they half-reclined on the face of a large flat rock, far up in the wilds of the Northwest, one pleasant summer day, a number of years ago.

"There's my gran'father," continued Nick, "who used to be the most onuspicious old gentleman that I ever knowed. I remember one day, when a man come along and offered to sell him a piece of land that he said was just the place to raise elephants onto to sell to the circus companies. The old man borrowed the money on a mortgage, and paid him his price fur the land, and then went out there to begin raisin' them little, pets. When he got there and come to locate his land, he found it was right in the middle of the Wisconsin river, where the water was twenty-four feet deep. That set the old gentleman in high dudgeon, and he come 'earin' back ag'in, and went for that swindler; but, when he found him, the chap axed his pardon on account of the little mistake that had been made, and that the tract he sold him laid a mile north of the spot where he had supposed it was. My gran'father swallowed it all and went back ag'in as happy as he could be, and when he come to make sure where it was, he found that the only way to reach it, was by taking a balloon and going a mile and a half up in the air. When my gran'father come back ag'in, he was never able to find the man he bought the land off of, which was a good thing fur the man, and it helped to make the old gentleman 'spicious, and that's why I ain't ready to say that this yere young Blackfoot is an honest boy,

thou' he does look as innocent in the face as a spring chicken."

"That's jest it," assented Oregon Sol, as he ejected a mouthful of tobacco-juice, with such skill as to knock a fly off the ear of the dog Calamity that was stretched out dozing at their feet; "th' 's whar the condemned diffikilty, as you call it, comes in. Sometimes I look into the face of Marunyo, the Indian boy, and I think if ever there was a young lamb goin' round onto two legs, that 'ere chap is him. You remember down on Dent's Bay, a month ago, when we war fishin', he swum out at night, fur over a mile, and to tell us that a party of them cussed Modocs, led by Captain Jack, was waitin' fur darkness so as to come down and raise our ha'r. No mistake, Marunyo kept us out of a mighty bad scrape that time, and I felt like axin' his pardon fur ever thinkin' anything wrong 'bout him. Then ag'in, thar didn't nothin' come to make me feel shaky, till a week or

two ago, when I war ne'r among the lava-beds and see'd Marunyo hobnobbin' with these same Modocs that are the meanest cusses that ever went unscalped."

"Wal, we've got to watch him mighty close, that's all," replied Nick. "Most of the Whiffles family was of a 'spicious nature. They always had a 'spicion that thar was something extronery in the way of smartness 'bout me, but when I grew up, my mother said it was one of them 'spicions that never was confirmed. The schoolmaster, howsumever, said I was a blasted fool, the first time he sot eyes onto me, and that 'spicion was confirmed. There was my aunt, too, that had her fust beau when she was seventy-three years old. She was so 'spicious that she was too young to keep company, that she made it a practice to set the dog on that Revolutionary pensioner when he come to see her."

"Did he keep it up?"

"Wal, yes—that is till he hadn't any more seats left to his breeches, and then, when he was layin' in bed to get 'em mended so as to begin over again, she run off with his father that had been a widower for more nor forty years."

"But ain't you a leetle inclined to be 'spicious yourself?" asked Oregon Sol, who, on this lazy summer afternoon, was disposed to humor the loquacity of his friend.

"That depends upon circumstances," was the reply.

"One time, when two other chaps and me war arter the same gal, I'd a 'spicion that one of 'em played a con-damn mean trick on both of us. He was a sort of a—"

"Hello what's up, Calamity?"

Nick's yarn was cut off abruptly, for the dog, that hitherto had seemed to be in sound sleep, suddenly raised his head and gave out a faint whine, the meaning of which was evident enough to the two trappers. It meant that some one was approaching and that it behoved them to be on the watch.

It was curious to notice the action of the two trappers the instant the dog uttered his warning. Sitting upon the broad rock, as they had been for the last hour, they were exposed to the bullet of any treacherous Modoc or Blackfoot that might creep up to them. But they knew their latitude pretty well, and the instant the sagacious dog apprised them of what was coming they slid off the rock as silently as a couple of serpents that had been basking in the sun, and screening themselves in the bushes



NICK WHIFFLES AND CALAMITY.

awaited until the precise nature of the danger should develop itself.

Calamity, having uttered the moan and risen to his feet, stood with his nose pointed toward the north, indicating that that was the direction from which the stranger was coming.

Nick Whiffles had seen signs of Modocs during the last few days, and it had made him rather uneasy, for it was only about a hundred miles to the north of this that he and Oregon Sol had their cabin or head-quarters, from which point they made excursions through long leagues of surrounding territory. Such a distance was a trifling one, and if the treacherous Modocs were thus close, there was reason to believe that they would pay the cabin their respects before they returned.

After rising to his feet, Calamity stood utterly motionless for two or three minutes, when he suddenly stretched out again, with his nose between his paws, as if he wished to finish the nap which had been interrupted.

"All right," exclaimed Nick Whiffles, as he witnessed the conduct of the dog. "That shows that there ain't any of the red-skins jest now that are tryin' to bore a hole into our carcasses. Come, Sol, we may as well git into that sunlight ag'in, and share it with the purp."

As the two trappers moved toward the tabular mass of stone, a figure emerged from the bushes upon the opposite side and approached them. Without exchanging any greetings, Nick and Sol took their stations behind the rock and awaited his coming.

It was the figure of a handsome, lithe, and graceful Indian youth, dressed in Indian costume, with a face of remarkable beauty. He had the dark, flashing eyes of the red-man, and the long, dark, sweeping hair worn by that race; but his features were more regular, and there was a certain grace and ease in his bearing that would have drawn attention, even among the most noted warriors of his own people.

He carried the knife at the girdle, a long silver-mounted rifle in his right hand, while his face was covered with paint—not of the hideous style generally adopted by the red-skins, but in the form of a dye.

"Wal, Marunyo, you seem to be all in a hurry," said Oregon Sol, extending his hand to the young Indian, as he came up. It was evident that he was a "brother" to the two trappers.

"Yes," replied the youth, speaking with an accent as pure as his own, "I have much to do. The red-men are still seeking wrong, and Marunyo has many miles to travel to get to the mountains ahead of the Modocs."

"Ain't you in the mountains now?" asked Nick Whiffles, who did not understand precisely his meaning. "That reminds me of an uncle that I once had that built him a house with a door back and front, and one day he made a bet with his wife that he could get in without her seein' him. Wal, my aunt took the bet and the old fool went out the door. She s'posed he meant to stay away till she got tired of watchin', when he would slip in and win the bet, so she made up her mind that she wouldn't be cotched that way, and she watched all the rest of the day, but when night come he hadn't showed himself. That made my virtuous aunt as mad as a hatter, and as she was gettin' sleepy, she hired a man to watch, with a big musket, and told him to shoot the first chap that he found tryin' to steal toward the house. She was always tender-hearted, was my aunt, and she told the feller on guard that he must make sartin and kill the burglar at the first fire, so as not to make him suffer too much. Wal, they didn't see him that night, nor the next one, nor the next month, nor next year, and my aunt concluded that the old feller was gone sartin sure, and she went in mournin' a year, and then began to receive the devours of a dry-goods clerk, that got four dollars a week, cash, and things was pretty near in shape for them to get spliced, when who should come walkin' in the back door one day but my uncle, who explained that in order to get into the house without her seein' him, he made a trip around the world. He did surprise her, and won the bet; but the Whiffles were always a smart set of folks."

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG INDIAN TRAILER.

THE young Indian, like all his race, knew how to bear pain and suffering without murmur or complaint. He seemed accustomed to the whimsicalities of Nick Whiffles, for although he was in great haste, and had only turned a little out of the way in order that he might exchange a word or two with his friends, he showed no

impatience, while the old hunter was indulging in one of his characteristic reminiscences. When Nick had finished, and before he could start off on another, Oregon Sol put in his question:

"Don't talk in riddles, Marunyo—but tell us what the row is this time. You spoke of the Modocs—what have they been doing?—scalpin', murderin', shootin' and skulpin', I s'pose; but what has that to do with you?"

The young Indian pointed to the northward, toward the far horizon, where the blue, cloud-like outline of a chain of mountains could be seen against the azure sky. It was a spur of that mighty chain which, extending from the arctic to the southern ocean, branches off in vast ridges, some of them extensive enough to make independent ridges of themselves.

As the two trappers followed the direction indicated by Marunyo, they knew that that blue streak of elevated land was in British America. Both had hunted the otter and beaver there, when in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company, and if Marunyo meant to imply that he was engaged upon an errand that would take him there, both knew that a number of days must elapse before they could see his face again.

"Wal, we see where you're pointing," said Nick Whiffles, after waiting a moment for the red-skin to speak. "That reminds me of what my grandmother once did, when I was on a visit to her. You see the old lady—"

"The Modocs are bad people," the Indian hastened to say, in order to arrest the threatened anecdote; "they are traveling northward toward the Saskatchewan."

"But they belong just the other way," said Oregon Sol, pointing to the southward. "Them Modocs belong among the lava beds of Oregon. I s'pose because it looks so much like the infernal country round there, that they feel at home."

"But some of them are traveling northward," replied Marunyo, "there are only a few, but they are bad, and Marunyo must follow and see what they do. He will be back in a few days, and then perhaps he will have a story to tell."

"It won't do any good, if you have," replied Sol, "while Nick is about. I'd like to see the man that could get the start of him in tellin' a yarn. I think that when the last messenger comes, Nick will ax him to hold on a few minutes till he tells him a little story about his gran'father, or uncle, or some of his relations. But, Marunyo, ain't you going to tell us any thing about this trouble?"

"Not yet," replied the Indian youth, who did not seem to relish this jocularity. "I go, but soon will be back."

And without any further words, he turned on his heel, and moving northward in the direction in which he had pointed, disappeared the next moment in the wood and bushes beyond.

And leaving Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol to themselves for a time, we must follow the Indian spy upon his errand, which was destined to prove the most eventful of his life.

It was late in the afternoon that he left the company of his two friends, and without once looking behind him, he moved with a peculiar loping gait, directly through the wood; like one who is certain of the precise destination toward which he is hastening. He carried his inseparable rifle in his hand, and, although his head was turned neither to the right nor the left, his senses were on the alert, and he could not have failed to detect any suspicious sound or sight near him.

For something like a mile the route led along a ridge, when a stream of water of considerable size was reached. Instead of advancing to the edge, Marunyo cautiously made his way back to the top of the ridge, and, after some maneuvering, managed to secure a position which afforded quite an extended view of the river in both directions.

Lying flat upon his face, with his body extended forward over what was here an overhanging bluff, the Blackfoot youth spent some fifteen minutes in scanning the extensive field, which was spread out before his vision. Roving hither and thither, his eye at last rested upon a point about a quarter of a mile distant, and upon the opposite side of the stream. Only the sharpest vision was able to detect a faint column of smoke rising from some spot within the wood, when the fire itself could not be seen.

"He is there," said Marunyo to himself. "Captain Jack and Flat-Nose Billy have come a long ways from the lava-beds with the two captives. They must be very valuable, or they would not carry them so far into the woods. But they mean that no one shall steal them away, nor that they shall escape themselves."

But Marunyo is on their path, and he shall follow them, if the trail leads him beyond the head-waters of the Saskatchewan."

Marunyo remained a few minutes longer gazing fixedly in the direction of the Indian sign, as if he hoped to detect something more tangible, but failing to do so, and as the day was drawing rapidly to a close, he carefully made his way down from the ridge, and drawing a small canoe from its concealment, launched it up on the river, sprung in and sped away like a swallow.

He headed straight toward the camp-fire, and as he was paddling against the current he crossed over to the other side, and ran in as close to the shore as possible, so as not only to take advantage of the more slowly flowing water, but to run so much less chance of being seen.

Having secured the position he was seeking, he made his progress much more gradual than it had been in crossing the river. It looked indeed as if he was seeking to defer his arrival upon the scene of the camp until after night had fairly settled over mountain and stream.

Not much need was there of his waiting, for already had the sun sunk out of sight in the Pacific, and the moon, half-full, shed a dim, uncertain light upon the river, while the little canoe crept along in the bank of deep shadow, with the silent, insidious motion of a phantom of the night.

Why was it that Marunyo, the young Blackfoot, was so carefully following the boat containing the two Modocs and their captives? It was not the first time that these woman-thieves had stolen white people and either murdered or made off with them. And knowing this, why should the young Blackfoot take such an extraordinary interest in the fate of these two particular ones?

None understood more thoroughly the character of the two men whom he was following. Flat-Nose Billy was one of the most treacherous dogs that ever bore the name of man, and the later crimes of Captain Jack, who crowned his life of infamy with the hellish assassination of General Canby, are so well known to our readers, and so fully reveal his nature that no further description is needed in this place.

Marunyo could have advanced to the camp, where these two Modocs were masters, and he would have been received as a friend. He had indeed performed more than one good office for the chieftain, in his capacity of spy, and was entitled to his gratitude.

But, that made the danger none the less. Captain Jack was now on a long journey from his home in the lava-beds, and was doubtless keeping a sharp look-out to see whether he was followed or not. For any one to attempt it was about equivalent to a deliberate commission of suicide.

This will explain the extreme caution of the Indian spy, who, as he found himself in the immediate vicinity of the camp, ceased paddling altogether and sat for a few minutes intently listening.

All was still, and reaching up, he grasped an overhanging limb, and drew the little boat against the bank. The next instant, he had drawn the prow up on the land, so skillfully concealed that it could not be seen by any one passing up or down the stream or bank.

At this moment, there was no more than a hundred yards between the Blackfoot and the camp, and he advanced, with the stealth that he used when moving at midnight among the hostile warriors among the Klamath lakes.

Still this particular portion of a scout's reconnaissance is not considered the most difficult nor the most dangerous by any means, and it did not require Marunyo a long time to gain a position from which he was afforded a complete view of the camp.

The sight that met his eyes would have awakened painful emotions in the heart of any one except a Modoc Indian. In the middle of a small natural clearing along the river was kindled a small fire, over which Flat-Nosed Billy was stooping, devoting all the energies of his mind and body to cooking a piece of meat, large enough to afford a good meal for half a dozen men.

Captain Jack, the Modoc leader, was stretched out flat upon his back, with his feet crossed and himself sound asleep. As he lay, the light was reflected against one side of his face, showing its horrible repulsiveness, which was on a par with that of Flat-Nosed Billy, who was ugly enough to give a brave man the fever and ague, the first time he looked upon him.

But Marunyo had seen these two friends too often to feel any great interest in them at this moment. Two others helped to make up that

little party, in whom his interest was of the profoundest nature.

One seemed to be a middle-aged woman, exceedingly well dressed, and with the air and appearance of a lady of wealth and refinement. She was seated on the sloping side of the hollow, and the light shining full in her face showed how great her terror was of the two wretches, who, for the time, were the arbiters of her fate. Her wild looks wandered from one to the other, and then at intervals her eyes dropped, and her moving lips showed that she was looking at and speaking to her companion whose head rested in her lap.

Marunyo strove hard to gain a view of the face of this lady, but the position of the head made his view very imperfect. The face, as revealed now and then in the fitful flashes of the camp-fire, showed that it was one of great beauty, and the outlines of the figure, as seen in the arms and shoulders, spoke of youth, symmetry and grace. An observer would have supposed that the relation between the two was that of mother and daughter, and such, we may as well state at this point, was the fact.

Crawling as near the camp as was possible, the Blackfoot lay flat upon his face and watched with an intensity of interest which it would be hard to describe.

Flat-Nosed Billy, whose face and features fully justified the sobriquet, devoted his whole attention to the venison which he was cooking, apparently unaware that any one else was in the vicinity. He had raked out some live coals from the fire, and with the meat impaled upon a number of green twigs, kept turning it over and over, so that the process of boiling was as perfect as it could well be.

All at once he ceased his culinary attempt, and gave utterance to an exclamation intended to signify that the work was completed.

The exclamation seemed to be understood by the others, for the elder lady looked toward him, and Captain Jack instantly rose to the sitting position, and in his characteristic manner, demanded his share. Flat-Nosed Billy, in obedience to his noble leader, cut off about one-half of the large piece and tossed it to him. The Modoc chieftain caught it up like a dog, and began devouring it with the rapacious greed of a wolf.

A couple of small pieces were flung to the ladies, Flat-Nosed Billy reserving a large portion for himself, which in a very short time disappeared down his capacious maw, and he looked around, as if he were able to dispose of the rest of the animal, if it were accessible.

But Marunyo scarcely bestowed a glance upon the repulsive looking Modocs. His eyes were fixed upon the two ladies, and he watched their movements with a depth of interest that can scarcely be imagined.

At a word from the elder, the younger raised her head from her lap, and began eating the food which had been given them. It was plain that they had little or no appetite for the feast, but evidently ate from a conviction of necessity.

The younger was dressed in a dark, handsome traveling suit, so that she was as well provided for this enforced journey as if she had made voluntary preparation. Her dark hair flowed around a handsome oval face, and the flashing black eyes spoke of one, who lacked not the will but the power to exterminate these two scamps from off the face of the earth.

Could any one have seen the face of Marunyo, the young Blackfoot, as, lying upon the ground, he watched the countenance of this lady, he would have suspected that the young warrior was smitten with a stronger emotion than mere friendship for her. His eyes seemed riveted upon her every movement, and when at last they turned from her to Captain Jack, they flashed with such a deadly hatred that that redoubtable chieftain might well have trembled had he been aware of the same.

Not rash or impetuous, the young Indian did a rash thing. His rifle seemed of itself to creep into position, and almost ere he was aware, he was pressing the trigger—the aim being drawn on the Modoc chief.

Crack! went the hammer. The cap only exploded. The rifle had "missed fire."

That miss had saved Captain Jack's worthless life, but it imperiled the life of the daring young Blackfoot. With a clear consciousness of his danger, Marunyo drew backward like a snake to cover; then rising, started on a run, closely followed by Flat-Nosed Billy, but ere long threw him off the trail, and again headed for the river.

By a long and circuitous route he picked his way through the wild, rocky region and approached the camp-fire from a direction almost

opposite to that he had followed at first. He caught the glimmer of the camp-fire when at a considerable distance, but upon coming nearer found no one near it. The appearance of the wood and embers showed that the party had been gone some time.

Marunyo was considerably disappointed, although he had partly expected something of the kind. He saw that he had nothing to do except to resume his pursuit, which he did without delay. His canoe, concealed with such care, was drawn from the bushes, launched into the water, and again he started up the stream, with greater speed this time than before.

Up the stream he paddled, with hands that seemed never to tire, his senses all alert for "sign" and to avoid a surprise. At length he was confronted by a waterfall of considerable dimensions, around which all comers had to make a "portage."

The Blackfoot had passed around the cataract, and was picking his way toward the water again, for the purpose of launching his canoe, when he was startled by catching sight of a light twinkling among the stunted trees and rocks that here lined the river. He paused on the instant, and laying down his canoe, started upon a cautious reconnaissance of this new camp-fire.

The result was the discovery that Captain Jack and Flat-Nosed Billy had made another halt, which, from all appearances, was intended to last until morning. Having satisfied himself upon this point, Marunyo retraced his steps, until he had reached a point below the falls, where he paused at what seemed a suitable place, and began building a fire for himself.

This, to say the least, was a singular proceeding, but it was followed by something still more singular and startling. An hour after the starting of the fire, the one single figure might be seen stretched out in front of the blaze, wrapped up from head to foot in his blanket, and to all appearance, in a deep, heavy slumber. Still the fire burned vigorously, for a goodly quantity of wood had been heaped upon it, and the Blackfoot lay with his feet turned toward the embers, as if he meant to continue comfortable until morning.

About midnight, the figure of a Modoc Indian crept as silently as a shadow from the darkness of the undergrowth, and advanced until he had reached the outer rim of the circle made by the blaze, where he paused. Here as the light fell upon his repulsive features they showed him to be no other than Captain Jack, who, in a crawling position, raised his rifle and pointed toward the unconscious figure.

It required only a second for him to make sure of his aim, when he pulled the trigger. There was no "flash in the pan" in his case, and the bullet sped true to its mark, fired, as it was, no further than twenty feet away.

Having discharged his rifle, the Modoc chieftain straightened up and stood looking steadily at the prostrate figure for full a minute.

"Marunyo has died the death of a traitor," he muttered, "but he was a good warrior, and I will not scalp him. I will leave him there for the wolves to eat."

And, with this Christian-like expression, he moved away toward his own camp, satisfied that he had ended all trouble from that quarter.

He had scarcely disappeared, when another figure emerged from the darkness, and, advancing to the prostrate figure, pulled the blanket aside.

This action revealed that, instead of a man being within, there was nothing but a simple log of wood, skillfully arranged with the mocassins at one end, so as to resemble the figure of a sleeping person.

It was Marunyo himself who had played this rather sharp trick, and a grim smile lit up his face, as he replaced his own mocassins, and threw his blanket over his shoulders, preparatory to moving further away, where, if he chose, he could spend a few hours in sleep, without the risk of being broken in upon by his enemies.

"Captain Jack thinks there is none now to follow him; he believes that the Drooping Lily has no friends to save her. Let Captain Jack look out!"

CHAPTER III.

A BIG "YARN."

"It's a condemned diffikilty, I allow," said Nick Whiffles, in reply to his friend Oregon Sol. "I've ciphered over it many an hour, and always come out where I went in. I think I've heard my gran'father speak of the same diffikilty at the time he was Governor of New

York. He found that he had promised one office to thirteen different burglars, and they all swore they'd have his life if he went back on his promise. And he knowed they'd do it, and you see there was where the trouble come in. He couldn't see his way clear out of the fix."

"But how did he git out?" asked the trapper.

"Heavens! how should I know?" replied Nick. "I didn't start to tell you a story, but only a diffikilty that he got into. Some of these days I'll tell you how he got out of the scrape, but only one thing at a time you know."

"But what has that to do what we're talkin' 'bout?"

"How in thunder should I know? I didn't say that it had any thing to do with it. But you see that it's gettin' well into summer, and if we're goin' to see any of them Hudson Bay fellows, we've got to be moving northward. They was down on the Saskatchewan last year long before this time, and if we loaf about here much longer we shall miss 'em altogether."

"Wal, I've been tryin' to coax you off fur a week past, but I couldn't get you started," replied Oregon Sol, determined that the blame should rest upon the right shoulders. "I s'pose the Blackfoot will go with us."

"I wouldn't bet much onto that, fur if he's gone off on a tramp there's no telling when he'll come back ag'in. Some of these days he won't come back at all, and then we'll have to go alone. That 'ere Marunyo is a very venture-some young lad, and is bound to get into trouble some day. He always reminds me of the time I was with the brigade on the 'Red River of the North.'"

As Oregon Sol himself had been in the employ of the same company, and had been with Nick Whiffles a great deal of the time, he remarked that he did not see what there was in such employment to remind him of the young Blackfoot.

"I can't help it, if you don't see what it is," replied the whimsical trapper; "it ain't the fault of some people if they're born without any brains, though my old schoolmaster used to think it was. We had a good party of us at that time, and now and then we come 'cross some odd people. There was the Raven of Red River, and lots of others, not to mention the young Injun warriors, that arterward proved to be gals of the female sex. We had some lively adventures, then, me and Calamity and my horse Shagbark; and there was a nice lot of folks that I helped get out of the hands of the varmints, by getting into their hands myself, and having somebody to help me out. But we all come out right side up, in the end, as I hope we will do in this 'ere case. Do you know what I think that young Blackfoot is drivin' at?" suddenly asked Whiffles, forgetting all about his promised reminiscences, and thinking only of the new suspicion that had come into his head.

"How should I know?" replied Sol. "How can I tell you what you're thinkin' 'bout, when half the time you don't know, yourself?"

"I 'spicion that he's arter some gal that some of the red-skins have run off with. If that's the case, why, we've got to jine in with him and go too."

"Why so?"

"'Cause on account of the gal in the case. Nick Whiffles ain't the man to stand back when there's any caliker that needs his help. It was always a weakness of the Whiffles family, and it ruined some of 'em. There was one uncle, the great traveler that rode all over Africa and Asia and New Jersey in a gig, because he was afraid he would be blown up if he traveled on the cars or in the steamboats. He was at the Cape of Good Hope, one day, when he heard that a young lady, belonging to a young ladies' boarding-school that had just started, had got lost among the bushes and hills to the north of that place. You understand that the young ladies' Institute had been started among the Hottentots, or Hotpots, or some such name, and as she had engaged to do the washin' and ironin', they couldn't very well spare her, though it didn't need such an inducement to start my uncle off, for he was, like the rest of the Whiffles family, ready to break his neck any time for the sake of helping along some female woman of the gentle sex."

"So my uncle only waited long enough to turn a collar that he had been wearing for three or four months, when he jumped into his gig and started for the country, where he had been directed to go to find the interesting young lady. I heard him remark afterward that the greatest bother he had was with the roads, which didn't seem to have been paved or repair-

ed for a long time. One time, he met a carriage comin' toward him, and started to turn out; the road was the sloping side of a mountain, so that, when he started, he kept turning out, till he and his animile had rolled three or four thousand feet down the side of the bottom. Uncle said he didn't mind the fall, and the rolling over several hundred times, 'cause he was used to that; but he was afraid that the chap that he turned out for might think he done it on purpose, and didn't know any better."

"But did he find the young lady?" asked Sol, who seemed disposed to humor his propensity for talking.

"You don't suppose he'd turn back when he had made up his mind to do a thing of that kind? That ain't the style of the Whiffles family. There's Calamity, when he fixes his teeth into a bear, Injun, or other animile, there it's bound to stick. So, as I was going to say, my uncle spit on his hands and went at it again. All the Hoppenhots that he met he stopped and inquired about the young lady. They was the most all-fired stupid set that he ever see'd. Some of 'em pertended that they couldn't understand what he wanted, and the others was so dumb that he had to shoot 'em afore they'd tell him what they know'd."

"But at last he larned 'nough to find out that she had been seen a couple of miles further on, where the elephants and lions were rather plentier than was healthy, and so he got in his gig again, jerked his lines, and started off on a jog-trot for the place, determined more than ever to git the gal."

"Did he carry any weapons with him?"

"Oh, yes; he always had two muskets under the seat of the gig. One of 'em hadn't any lock or stock, and the other hadn't any barrel. But, take the two together, and they made one good gun, and he felt that he could get along if the elephants didn't shove in onto him too fast."

"His animile kept up his trot till he had gone more nor two miles, and he was looking around for some signs of the female, when his boss gave a shy to one side, so sudden-like that my uncle turned over on his head, with his feet p'inting up in the air. He was rather fat and heavy-like, and he could sleep on his head as well as any other way, and so, instead of righting himself ag'in, he laid still, with his head down, his feet up, and his boss jogging-like, till he could look round and see what it was that had skeered his animile, for he know'd it must be something unusual to do that."

"It was a good time afore he see'd anything to account for the skeer of the critter, but at last he see'd it, and what do you s'pose it was?"

Oregon Sol scorned to notify his friend again that he had not the remotest conception of the novel phase of the story he had set out to tell, and Nick Whiffles resumed:

"What he observed was three lions and three elephants galloping after him. It was a remarkable coincidence that there should be the same number of each kind of animals, but such was the solemn fact, and they were all headin' toward him. He managed to straighten up and twist 'round, so as to get on the right end, and then he whipped up his boss to make 'im trot a little faster in the hope of gettin' away, but it was a principle with that boss not to go any faster than that one gait, and so my uncle stopped yellin' at and whacking him, and looked round at the animiles that were keeping him company. There was three elephants on one side the road and the three lions on t'other, 'cause you know them critters don't hang together very well, and they was all holding back waitin' fur the others to begin the fight, so as to git a better chance."

"My uncle was a-lookin' at the front elephant, when he noticed the critter wink his eye in a queer way at him. When the animal had done it two or three times, then the great traveler see'd what it meant. It was the same elephant he had seen in a circus company in the State of Connecticut. It was at a time that my uncle was driving a load of hay to town, when the elephant slipped 'long behind him and eat it all up, and when he drove on the scales to get his hay weighed, he looked round and found it all gone."

"Wal, of course, the elephant felt very tender toward my uncle, and he meant all this winking to let him know that he was his friend, and had come along to stand by him and help him. That made the traveler feel a good deal easier, and he kept jogging 'long, willin' to wait till the others got ready to make the attack."

"He did not have to wait long, when one of the lions gave a yelp and made a jump. He went up pretty high in air, and just as he was

about to light, the elephant that had gone into partnership with my uncle, cotched the lion on his tusk which went straight through him, and held him pinned fast. About the time this was done, the second lion was in the air and he cotched him the same way on his other tusk, so that he had them both fast, where they couldn't do anything."

"But, you said there was three of 'em. What had become of the other?"

"He was an awful fool. He might have knowed better, but, I s'pose when he saw them two lions stuck on the tusks of the elephant, he thought there warn't nothin' in the way to hinder him from havin' a fair show at my uncle; so he give a big howl and licked his chops, and made a bigger jump than either of the others. I allow that things did look a little shaky just then, but you've heard how smart some elephants are, and this one went a little ahead of any that I ever heard tell on, and if it hadn't been my own uncle that told me the story, I would have thought there was some little mistake about it. But, as I often heard him tell it, there couldn't have been. The elephant waited till the third lion was pretty well up in the air, when he whirled 'round, quick as a flash, threw up his tail, and caught him on the end of that. Then he had all three, you see, and the other elephants were kind of partners of his and they traveled off with him, so that my uncle was left alone to continue his journey after the young lady."

"Did he cotch her?"

"Wal, the old gentleman never finished the rest of the story; when he got that far in it he always dropped off to sleep. The Whiffles family were always great on sleeping. I once had an aunt that made a bet—"

"Never mind about that yarn now," interrupted Oregon Sol, seeing there was little prospect of Nick Whiffles ever reaching the end of his stories. "You said we war to make a start northward to-day. It's past noon now, and it's time we war on the move."

Nick seemed to rouse himself to a sense of his duty, and coming to his feet with something of the vim and activity of earlier years, he called to his dog, Calamity, that had wandered off in the woods somewhere. In a moment the sagacious canine came trotting forth as if he knew that something rather unusual was expected of him, and the two trappers, with the brute leading the way, moved off through the solitude, for a hundred yards or more, when they reached a fantastic-looking structure made of skins, logs, bark and branches of trees put together with no little skill, forming a cabin with an interior of something like a dozen feet in every direction.

This was the cabin home of Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol, when on their trapping expeditions in the far north-west. Its position was so secluded and well concealed that it had never yet been disturbed by the visits of any Indians, nor white men besides themselves.

Here they had made their head-quarters for several winters, and there was something in the lonely life so attractive to both that they occasionally extended their stay until far into the summer, only visiting some of the frontier forts, for the purpose of disposing of their peltries, and procuring ammunition and a few necessities.

The trappers paused only long enough to fill their powder-horns and bullet-pouches, when Oregon Sol mounted his little black pony, and Nick Whiffles bestrode his faithful beast, Shagbark, and, with Calamity trotting beside them, they turned their faces northward, and began their long and eventful journey.

CHAPTER IV.

A LOST SNOB.

LEAVING the scene of their trapping operations for the last few months, Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol headed directly northward, and continued that course for the remainder of the afternoon. Mounted on horses as they were, it would have been impossible for them to have kept up their journey over the wild, broken ground for any length of time, but for the fact that they were following a sort of forest trail, that had been used often enough to mark the route with just enough distinctness for their animals.

As was generally their custom, the intelligent dog Calamity kept ahead of the others, picking the way, and holding himself in readiness to give due warning of the approach of any danger. The trappers relied almost entirely upon him, and scarcely spoke of or gave a thought to danger.

From what has already been said, it will be understood that there was really little occasion to think of danger, for they were already so far

north that they were practically out of the range of danger. When one approaches or crosses the boundary line between the United States and British America, he has little to dread from the red-skins whom he encounters. The more warlike and vengeful are further south, and although he runs the risk of being annoyed with thieves, yet it is not apt to be anything more serious.

The precise cause of Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol moving northward at this particular juncture, was not to follow or meet the young Blackfoot, as might have been inferred from what has already been told, but it was in order to keep an engagement made almost a year before, with an agent of the Hudson Bay Company, whom he had met at Fort Alfred.

This man was engaged in purchasing furs and peltries from Indians in Oregon and British America, and wished to employ Nick and Sol to visit a section of which he had heard considerable, in order to ascertain whether it was worth while for the Company to send half a dozen trappers down into that region.

As the section referred to was somewhere near their own hunting-grounds, the trappers gladly undertook the job. They had spent a month in a thorough exploration of the territory, finding it possessed only of medium advantages, and were on their way northward, to make their report according to agreement.

The fact that the general direction they were following was the same as that taken by Marunyo, had occurred to them, as well as the consequential fact that there was a strong probability of meeting; for a party of such experienced hunters as they were pretty certain to detect each other, if they came anywhere near each other.

But these facts did not influence them in the least in the direction which they took. Marunyo had used his canoe, and they could have changed their course without trouble so as to keep much nearer the river than they were doing.

The conclusion of both hunters was that if the young warrior wanted to see them, it was his place to hunt them up, and not theirs to hunt him.

Nick calculated that it would require some three days of traveling before they could reach Fort Alfred, which was on British soil, and was one of the posts of the Hudson Bay Company. There they expected to find the gentleman in question, and to complete the engagement made with him.

As the afternoon advanced, there was quite a perceptible change in the temperature. They were so far northward, and it was yet so early in summer, that the only way to enjoy the sunlight in all its fullness was by stretching upon the face of some rock, where there was no wind or shadow to disturb, which, it will be remembered, Oregon Sol and Nick Whiffles were doing at the time they were introduced to our readers.

It was quite chilly now, and the wind that struck their faces, as they ascended the top of some ridge, or crossed some unprotected space, had a stinging, cutting sharpness about it, as if it came from the regions of eternal ice and snow which could be seen towering aloft in the western horizon.

It lacked an hour yet of sunset, when Nick Whiffles reined up his horse, and waited for a moment until Oregon Sol could come up beside him and do the same. They were on the top of an eminence some hundred feet in height, which was covered with stunted pine, and from which they gained quite an extensive view of the surrounding country.

Accustomed as the men were to the majestic scenery of the West and North-west, they seemed impressed by the peculiar sublimity of the region in which they now found themselves. They sat for several minutes motionless and silent upon the backs of their steeds, their eyes wandering over the wonderful expanse stretching out before them.

Years of the rough, dangerous life of the North-west showed themselves in the next action of the two men, who, glancing only at the prominent features of the landscape, began searching for signs of life.

While Nick Whiffles's keen eye roved off toward the east, Oregon Sol, with scarcely less keen vision, scrutinized the eastern and northern territory.

Both were successful to a certain degree, for, some two or three miles distant on the slope of an elevated ridge, smoke could be seen rising from among the trees, which grew here very close together, proving that quite a goodly-sized camp-fire was burning there.

His keenest scrutiny failed to reveal any signs of persons, so he could only conjecture whether they were Indians or white men. Indeed he had no great interest to know, for he could not imagine that he had any concern with them.

"Now, that 'ere is what I call odd," suddenly exclaimed Oregon Sol, when the eye had spent several minutes in scrutinizing the country about them.

"What's that?" asked Nick Whiffles, turning his head upon hearing the remark.

"Why, look at that feller off yender," he replied, pointing to a small stream less than a quarter of a mile distant.

Looking toward the point indicated, Nick saw the figure of a man standing on the bank of the stream, gazing toward them. His dress showed that he was of the same race as themselves, but he seemed to be entirely alone and without horse, dog or even boat. He held a rifle in one hand and was leaning back against a tree, as though he imagined the two hunters were about to paint his portrait, and he was willing to stand there all day and bear their scrutiny.

"It ain't a Hudson Bay or Nor'wester," remarked Sol, when they had scrutinized him for some minutes.

The sight of a man of their own race in a solitude like this was such an unusual occurrence that the trappers resolved on a closer acquaintance. They were on the point of starting toward him, when Sol called the attention of his friend to the fact that the stranger had already made a move in their direction.

It was not until the stranger began moving toward them that they observed his immense size. He was fully six and a half feet in height, if not more, with his body filled out in proportion.

The distance between the parties was so slight that it took the men only a short time to pass it. For most of the way he was invisible in the wood, but in a short time he made his appearance at the bottom of the ridge and walked toward them.

"How do you do, Mr. Nicholas Whiffles?" he demanded, as he approached and extended his hand. "I guess you don't remember me."

"Can't say that I do," replied the trapper, peering inquiringly into his face, as he reached down and took his hand. "You've got a sweet, interestin' face, by gracious, you have; but I don't call to mind that I ever see'd it before."

The large, heavy-framed stranger enjoyed the wonderment of the two hunters for a few minutes, and then explained:

"I was at Fort Alfred last summer when you came up there and made the agreement with Captain Green to come in this summer and give your report about some place, where he thought there was a chance of finding some extra beavers. I am Mr. Fitzsimmons, that was attached to the brigade in the character of a scientific guide."

"What are you doing here, then?"

"I'm lost."

There was something so ludicrous in the idea of this large man, after announcing himself as a scientific guide, adding, directly on the heels of it, that he was lost, that both Nick and Sol indulged in a hearty laugh, while he remained as serious and solemn as if listening to his own funeral discourse.

"Where is the brigade?" asked Nick.

"Heaven only knows. Science has sent them all to the dogs, where I'm afraid I'm going too, unless science gets over the drunk it seems to be on just now."

The man rattled on so incoherently about science, and the dangers that it had inflicted upon him, that the trappers for a time were disposed to believe that he was some lunatic that had broken loose and had wandered off into this part of the world.

Mr. Fitzsimmons was an Englishman, who had been in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company for a couple of years, most of the time having been spent in their office in London. The picture of robust health and vigor, he suddenly formed the idea that his health was failing and he came on a visit to the wilds of America for the purpose of recruiting.

He was a man of wealth and respectability, and desirous that his position and ability should be recognized, he announced himself as "surveyor of the brigade," and proceeded to enter upon his duties at once.

Such an office as "surveyor of the brigade" had never been heard of before, and as he did not interfere with the others in the discharge of their duties, his conceit was not interfered with, and he was permitted to rave about science to his heart's content.

His principal business seemed to consist in consulting a small pocket-compass, which he brought with him from England, and in making observations of the stars during the evening. As Nick Whiffles afterward learned, Fitzsimmons started out with the brigade, and for several days they had no trouble with him, but at the end of that time he insisted that some deference should be paid to his scientific attainments.

"I carried the compass with me," said he, in explaining the circumstance, "and I knew how to box it, and at night I could read the stars in the sky, and tell 'em just where they was, but that Captain Green is—"

"But you hain't told us how you and the brigade come to be apart," put in Oregon Sol.

"It was all their fault," replied Fitzsimmons.

"I let them all have their way without trying to interfere with them, till I observed how completely they were violating the laws of science every day. One morning Captain Green remarked that he was anxious to reach a place called Blackfoot Rock, which laid due north of us. Upon hearing that, I took my compass and showed him the way the needle pointed, and that instead of going north, as he supposed, he was proceeding almost exactly east. I explained the whole thing to him, and when I got through what do you suppose he did? He just laughed, and said that compass business was played, ever since Chris. Columbus started for the East Indies, and, by following the compass, fetched up against America, instead. I asked him if he was sure that Blackfoot Rock was exactly north, and he said there was no doubt of it. Then I told him that I would go afoot, and he would see how much sooner I would get there than he. He replied that he would be very glad to make such an arrangement—and so I started."

"How long ago was that?"

"Nearly four days, and it seems to me that it is about time I came across that Blackfoot Rock, which I heard described very accurately, and which I'm sure I would identify the minute I saw it. Do you know where it is?"

"Oh, yes; we've been there often."

"How much longer will I have to travel to reach it?"

"Wal," replied Nick Whiffles, "I think if you keep up a pretty good gait, you might do it in three or four years. They say a man can git around the world in that time and come back to where he started from."

"But you said you were on your way to Blackfoot Rock, didn't you?"

"I'm on my way to meet Captain Green and his brigade," replied Nick Whiffles; "but I expected to do it at Fort Alfred. Howsumever, if he's started for the other place, that's where I'm going."

"Then I'll go with you, and let the compass alone for the present."

"We'll be glad to have you, of course," replied Nick, with his old smile; "provided you don't undertake to play the guide for us. You'll excoose us from trustin' too much to a chap that is going south-east all the time, and then swears it's due north."

The Englishman was too much chagrined at the ludicrous mistake he had made to run any risk of repeating it, and he replied that, in deference to the superior knowledge of Nick Whiffles, he agreed not to raise his voice a single time in opposition to any plan or schemes of his. And thus the two parties "consolidated" at once.

CHAPTER V.

WHIFFLES IN DANGER.

Now that the destination of Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol had been changed from the fort to the station or rock, the distance was thereby so much lessened that they calculated upon reaching it by the succeeding evening, provided that nothing unexpected intervened to prevent.

After the two trappers had made a rather careful survey of their surroundings, they concluded to camp where they were, at the base of the ridge. There was a stream of water near at hand, from which they were confident of enticing all the fish that was necessary for their supper.

There was little danger to be apprehended from the Indians, as the trappers were almost too far north for that; but the fact that Captain Jack and another Modoc, at least, had gone northward, was enough to prevent that feeling of absolute safety which otherwise would have characterized Oregon Sol and Nick Whiffles.

By the time the arrangements had been com-

pleted, it was growing dark, and leaving Sol and Fitzsimmons in charge of the camp, Nick Whiffles moved off up-stream in quest of something for supper.

The stream was really nothing more than a brook, across which he could easily leap at any place. The water was quite shallow and clear, and there was no doubt that it was plentifully stocked with fish; but, in the dim-gathering twilight, as he walked slowly along the bank, peering into the water, he felt that peculiar dissatisfaction with each place at which he halted which will sometimes come over a person. Just as he was about to cast the line, it struck him that the very place for which he was searching was a little further on.

In this manner he advanced several hundred yards from camp, until, smiling at his own childishness, he paused where a projection of land produced an eddy in the stream, and where he was certain of finding all the fish he could need.

"What do you say, Calamity?" he said, addressing his dog, that had been walking contentedly behind him; "shall we settle and begin work here? I guess."

The trapper had furnished himself with all the bait he could need before starting, and it required but a moment for him to complete his preparations.

It was a favorite custom with him, when fishing at night, to kindle a fire upon the bank of the stream. This was always sure to bring the fish around him, and he insisted that he always caught much larger ones than otherwise.

In accordance with this custom which he had followed so long, he proceeded to gather sticks and twigs, and in a short time had a big fire burning close to the edge of the water and throwing a light far up and down stream.

"That'll fetch 'em," he remarked, to his dog. "We'll soon have a supper that'll suit all hands."

He was not mistaken. He had scarcely thrown in his line, when it was seized by a large fish, which was promptly landed upon the ground beside him. The same thing was repeated again and again, and he had soon secured all that the three could possibly dispose of.

This done he ceased fishing, and picking up those that he had captured, proceeded to string them upon a branch for the purpose of carrying them back to camp, when the dog Calamity showed by his actions that he desired to bear a hand in the business.

To gratify him, the trapper permitted him to take the end of the branch in his mouth, and although the weight was quite heavy, the pup galloped away as delighted as if he were providing himself with the choicest dinner possible, after a prolonged fast.

Understanding as well as did his master what was required of him, he sped straight to camp with his load, and was there before Nick left the little fire which he had kindled.

"No need to hurry," he said, to himself, with a grin, as he stood examining his rifle by the firelight. "It'll take a few minutes for 'em to br'il them floppers, and by the time Oregon Sol has 'em ready, I reckon he'll find me a little closer nor I am now. I don't think it would do to give that 'ere Fitzsimmons the start on either of us. I hauled in eight or ten pounds extra on account of the length of his stomach. The Whiffles were always blessed with a purty good appetite, but I don't b'lieve that 'ere Englishman has had anything to eat for two or three weeks, and when that's the case it's pretty hard to gauge a man's appetite."

Somehow or other, as Nick Whiffles stood here dallying with his gun and loitering behind until his friend could make some progress in the preparation of his supper, he was conscious of a curious feeling that he had noticed several times before, but only upon rare occasions.

It was a gathering and increasing conviction that some one else was near him in his solitude. It was this same strange sensation that had warned him of the approach of danger more than once, and that caused him to suspect even now that something unusual impended.

Looking up-stream, the surface of the water gleamed in the firelight, as it flowed by in majestic silence, while behind and across, the darkness was dense and impenetrable. A low, solemn murmur filled the air, as if it were the sighing of the vast solitude.

Just above the tree-tops, the faint figure of the moon could be seen in the clear sky, its light so faint as to produce no perceptible effect upon the river and forest. Nick Whiffles had trod the wilds often enough to become inured to such scenes, but there was something to-night

that impressed him, as he had rarely been impressed before.

Leaning his long rifle upon the ground, he folded his arms over the muzzle, and looked out upon the firelit stream beyond. As he stood thus, with the campfire burning behind him, his long, gaunt figure was brought out in bold relief, and viewed from the opposite shore, was of startling distinctness.

He was wrapped in reverie—reverie of the past. He was recalling the many eventful and checkered scenes through which he had gone and in which he had borne such a prominent part. He saw again the figures of those with whom he had been associated—the beautiful, the grave, the gay, the old and young, the curious and strange—as they filed before him in a phantom-like procession.

But deep as was his meditation, he could never forget himself entirely. He always realized where he stood, and so it was that when a faint, almost inaudible sound struck upon his ear, he instantly straightened up and listened.

"I heard something unusual just then," he said, to himself, in a whisper. "I knowed there was something in the wind to-night. Yas, there 'tis ag'in."

It was a soft, faint rustle, as if made by some one stealing through the forest, but it sounded up the stream, and he knew it came from the surface of the water.

"It's an Injin paddle," he added, a few minutes later. "I've heard the same sound too many times to mistake about it. Whoever it is, he's coming this way, and I'll wait till I see who it is that's off on a pic-nic excursion to-night."

Gradually it became more distinct, and the trapper knew that it was approaching at a leisurely gait. He could tell to a moment, when it would reach a point opposite where he stood, and still watching and listening, he calmly awaited its arrival.

None could know better than did Nick Whiffles, how prominent a figure he would soon be to the inmates of the strange canoe, standing as we have shown directly in front of the firelight, but, for all that, he made no move toward shifting his position, so as to place himself out of range of the strangers, who could so easily pick him off with their rifles. He felt no misgivings, and was content to wait until they should reveal themselves.

"I'm purty well up north," he said to himself; "the cold weather in these parts seems to freeze the nateral deviltry out of a red-skin, though there are some of the animals that it would take a month in the middle of an iceberg, with them as stiff as a gun-barrel, before you could trust 'em. They may be strangers to me, but," he said, with something of pride in his modulated voice, "I wouldn't be afeard to wager my gun here that they've heard of Nick Whiffles of en. The Whiffles family always contrive to make themselves heard tell of, in some way or other. When they ain't governing some State, or making speeches in Congress, they're catching beavers or sarcumventing red-skins. The canoe 'll be in sight the next minute."

So it proved; for while he stood facing upstream in the darkness, the form of a canoe all at once shot into view, as it entered the broad, faint line of light thrown out by the fire.

For a few seconds, the trapper stood motionless, and then, as he discerned the two Indians that sat within, he instinctively stepped back a pace or two and clutched his rifle.

"Modocs!" he exclaimed to himself; "they're a treacherous set, and I don't like 'em, and them is two of the worst of the whole lot. What are they doing so far north as this? They don't belong here, and I feel like ordering 'em off our trapping-grounds, back to their own lava-beds."

He had recognized the two red-skins, as the arch-villains Captain Jack and Flat-Nosed Billy. He had seen them before, and he always felt, as he had declared, like sending a bullet through the head of each.

Captain Jack, the notorious leader, was seated in the stern with all the dignity and importance of a king, while his companion was using the paddle in a lazy, listless manner, as though he had the whole night before him in which to perform a journey of a few miles.

Upon seeing the trapper, they had been turned toward shore, and the next moment, the prow touched the land, and Flat-Nosed Billy stepped out.

"How does my brother, the great hunter, do?" he asked, as he extended his hand, which was taken rather reluctantly by Nick, who replied:

"Purty well; I hain't had to call in a doctor

lately, and you look as though you wa'n't troubled with biliousness or loss of appetite yourself."

"Modoc warrior much well," replied the Indian, in rather good English.

"I'm glad to hear it; hope you'll continner to feel so. A man with a sick stomach ain't of much account in this world. He's sartin to git in some condemned diffikilty. It was the Whiffles family that made that diskivery a good many years ago, afore I came into this troublesome world. But, Flat-Nose, ain't you a leetle out of your latitude, in coming so fur north?"

"The Modocs go where they wish," was the pompous reply. "Captain Jack and me have been on a big hunt. Now we go back to home in the mountains. Why comes my brother so far from home?"

"My home is anywhere in the North-west," returned Nick, with a sweep of his arm. "I am on my way to Blackfoot Rock to meet the brigade of the Hudson Bay Company."

"Then you go home?" was the next question, whose quick eagerness did not escape the notice of the trapper.

"That depends upon sarcumstances. It would bother any of the Whiffles family to tell where they'll be or what they'll do next week. Mebbe I'll come back, and mebbe won't. If you'll call on me next winter, I'll let you know."

"Does my brother come alone, so far north?" continued the Modoc.

"Sometimes he does, and sometimes he doesn't. Leastrate I ain't apt to go fur without Calamity and Shagbark."

"But they do not meet my eyes," said Flat-Nosed Billy, looking about him, as if he expected to see them come out of the darkness and approach the camp.

"No; they never was very good on meeting a feller's eyes. Fact is, they don't meet me very often, unless I go to meet 'em myself."

"Good-night, my brother," added the Indian, as he stepped back in the canoe and picked up his paddle again.

"Good-night," replied the trapper, with a fatherly wave of his hard, bony hand, "may you have sweet dreams, as the virtuous always deserve."

During this conversation, it will be noticed that Captain Jack said not a word, nor did he show any disposition to join it. All the time, he sat motionless in the canoe, looking at the two, as if he considered it beneath his dignity to take part in such frivolous employment.

As he took no notice of Nick, the latter was equally considerate in ignoring his presence altogether, directing his words entirely to his companion, although he kept one eye upon the leader of this detestable gang; and, as the canoe slowly glided away in the darkness, he stepped back, in the most natural manner in the world. Seemingly, there was no object in making such a movement, but there was, nevertheless.

"If I had only knowed it was them," he thought, "I wouldn't give 'em such a good chance, and they ain't a-goin' to git it ag'in. There's some condemned diffikilty that them varmints have got into I allow, to fotch 'em so fur north as this. Wonder now if they ain't the scamps that Marunyo has been follerin'! He started off this way, and them's just the animiles to be in that sort of business. I hope the Blackfoot has learned what it is, for I hain't got anything partic'lar on hand with the brigade. I would just as lief spend a week in sarcum-ventin' them red-skins as not."

He stood back in the gloom away from the camp-fire, listening to the sound of the paddle of the Modoc, as it grew fainter and fainter each moment, and then as he was about to start on his return to camp, his attention was arrested by the sound of another oar being dipped into the water at no great distance from where he stood. This, too, came from a point somewhere up-stream, and was much closer than was the other canoe when he first detected its approach, owing to the precaution which was taken to guard against being discovered.

"That chap knows how to swing the paddle," said Nick Whiffles, as he stood and listened. "Unless a man has got as long ears as I have, he ain't apt to hear 'im. There's some devilment on foot, as sure as the world, and I think it's time that I found out suthing about it. He's close on hand now."

A few moments later the second canoe shot to view, following almost precisely the tracks of the first, and the first glance showed that it was occupied by but one single person, who was the young Blackfoot warrior, Marunyo.

"Just what I thought," said Nick Whiffles to himself, again stepping forward in front of the fire. "That's what the red-skin is doing—fol-

lerin' up them cussed Modocs, and if he keeps it up much longer, he'll be likely to come back with his scalp left behind him. How is my brother, Marunyo, to-night?" he asked, as the Indian sprung out and took his hand.

"Have you seen Captain Jack and his men?" he asked, disregarding the question.

"See'd 'em both. Shook hands with Flat-Nosed Bill, and my arm has felt ever since as though I'd been stroking the back of a rattlesnake. You're follerin' 'em, Marunyo, and now what p'ison diffikilty is on foot?"

The Blackfoot then narrated all that has already been told the reader. After telling of the trick he played upon the Modocs, by which he made them both believe that he had fallen a victim to their hatred, he explained that he resumed the pursuit and continued it in a more cautious manner, when, by some inadvertence which he could not understand, he lost the trail altogether, and only to-night was he enabled to get upon it again, and it was due to accident more than anything else, that he had found them again. He had not been able to catch a glimpse of them in the darkness and was not positive that he was really pursuing the right men, until his suspicions were confirmed by what the trapper had told him. When he learned further that the two Modocs were alone in the canoe, he was completely astonished, and scarcely knew what to make of it.

"Then Drooping Lily and her mother have been killed!" he exclaimed, in a voice of anguish.

"Not quite so bad as that," replied Nick Whiffles, who was enabled to comprehend the situation more correctly. "They've took them precious animiles with 'em to the place where they mean to keep 'em, fur a few years, or till they kin get a good big ransom fur 'em. They've fixed things so they can't git away, and Captain Jack and Flat-Nosed Billy has started fur hum ag'in. Mebbe they wouldn't have done it if they'd knowed that you hadn't gone under yit."

"Then I must turn back and hunt for the place where she is hid, for Marunyo can never go back to his hunting-grounds and leave Drooping Lily behind."

"Struck, I allow," remarked Nick with a grin; "spected it afore. That's right, howsumever, 'cause I used to act that way myself."

"Can't my brother, the great hunter, go with me?" asked the Indian, with such a wistful, pleading look in his eyes that the heart of the trapper was touched.

"Would like to, by 'mighty, and I guess I will, but I can't do it right away. I tell you, Marunyo," he added, "you know where Blackfoot Rock is, don't yer?"

The young warrior replied in the affirmative.

"I'm on my way to that air, 'spect to be thar by day arter to-morrer, as I'm under an engagement to meet the brigade. You can do what huntin' 'round you've got time to do; then strike fur that place, and Oregon Sol and me will join forces with yer, and make a dead set for the Drooping Lily, as you call her."

The eye of the Blackfoot sparkled. Nothing could have suited him better, unless it was a pledge from Nick that the junction should be made at once.

"Good-by," he said, taking his hand. "When the sun goes down the second time after to-day, Marunyo will meet his brother at Blackfoot Rock, and then shall come the rescue of Drooping Lily."

"You don't think so much of the old lady as the young one," said the trapper, still holding the hand that rested in his own.

And then he was proceeding to give him some advice upon love matters, in his quaint, original way. Naturally talkative, he seemed to enjoy hearing himself speak just now, while the Blackfoot, impatient as he was to get away, repressed his emotions, and listened with the deference of a slave receiving the commands of his lord and master.

Thus they stood face to face, with their hands clasped and the camp-fire smoldering between them and the forest, when there was the slightest possible rustling in the bushes in the rear of the trapper. It might have been made by the hopping of a bird or the falling of a leaf—so slight and faint indeed was it, that neither of the two men paid any attention to it.

But it had a deadly meaning; and within the next minute the outlines of a crouching Indian were revealed in the shadowy gleam, as he stole forward with the slow, cautious, and perfect silence of the creeping panther.

He was exactly behind Nick Whiffles, whose large frame could easily obstruct the view of Marunyo, as he stood listening to the words of the hunter.

As he advanced still further in the dim twilight of the camp-fire, and his hideous face reflected the features of the Modoc, Flat-Nosed Billy, it could be seen that he carried a long, gleaming knife in his right hand.

The wolfish, eager glance that he cast upon the form of Nick Whiffles left no doubt of his purpose to bury the knife in his back the instant he should approach nigh enough.

CHAPTER VI.

FOOLISH MERCY.

"I DON'T know a mighty heap about you," said Nick Whiffles, still holding the hand of the young Blackfoot in his own, and looking down in his face in his quaint, fatherly way. "There be some things in your actions which I'm free to say ain't as clear to me as I've see'd the sun sometimes in the middle of the day. But sich leetle diffikilties ain't worth the bothering over, when a man has got them diffikilties that are p'izener than them. Now, I don't know who this here Drooping Lily and the elder gals be, but, from your description, I powerfully 'spect that they're of the female sex, and you're in love with the younger one. I've been in love myself," he added, with a sigh like that of a pair of blacksmith's bellows, "and I've heard my father say that he was once in love with my mother, a good many years ago; but he got over it ag'in as soon as they hitched together. There's nothin' like hitching teams to cure a feller of love—which is the reason that Nick Whiffles don't get married. He's been in love one hundred and eighty-four times, more or less, and there ain't any doubt but, at this minute, there's about double that number of female ladies down in the clearings that are in love with him, and the only way he can keep from marrying 'em is by coming out to the trapping-grounds, so as to keep away from 'em. As long as a woman sighs and hankers arter you, she thinks a good deal more about you than she does arter she's got you, and that is why I steer clear of the females when I find that my booty is beginning to disturb thar peace of mind, and prevent thar eating more nor eight or ten pounds a day of pork and beans. I s'pose, Marunyo, that you're wondering what all this talk means, and what it has got to do with Drooping Lily, and mebbe you're getting a little impatient to be off."

Flat-Nosed Billy, the Modoc, by this time had reached the point nigh enough for him to strike the fatal blow. He was still in a crouching position, and grasping the murderous-looking knife in his hand, he began rising slowly to his feet, so as to gather the force necessary to drive the blow home.

Still Nick Whiffles was talking, in his humorous way, with the Blackfoot before him, with no suspicion of the deadly enemy in his rear.

The latter had almost straightened himself, and was already drawing his hand back, with all the concentrated hatred and treachery that comes natural to a Modoc, when there was a sudden growl, a whirring rush, and a dark body bounded like an immense ball, from the darkness, and the next instant Flat-Nosed Billy rolled over upon the ground, with the teeth of Calamity fastened upon his throat.

The sudden, overwhelming shock caused the knife to fly out of his hand, and he went backward with frightful violence, the dog clinging to him with an immovable gripe. The wretch struggled and clawed with his hands in his efforts to get free of his merciless enemy.

Flat-Nosed Billy was a terrible-looking object, as he lay struggling upon his back, with the mastiff at his throat. The fire-light falling upon his face, showed his black eyes protruding horribly, while the checked respiration caused him to gurgle and gasp like one who was strangling to death.

With the rushing charge of Calamity upon the Indian, Nick Whiffles had wheeled with the suddenness of lightning, while Marunyo stepped cautiously back in the darkness, as if to prevent himself being identified by the red-skin upon the ground.

"Oh, it's a little diffikilty between Flat-Nosed Billy and the pup," replied Nick Whiffles, who fully understood what it all meant, and did not fail to appreciate the inestimable service done him by his dog. "It's allers a principle of mine never to interfere with other folks' quarrels. I may say that it's the principle of the Whiffles family, ever since my uncle, the traveler, got into a p'ison diffikilty in India from poking his nose into other folks' quarrels. He was riding along one day in his gig, when he espied two tigers fighting alongside the road. It made him feel bad to see the way they was clutchin' and clawin' each other, and he hollered to 'em

to stop; but seeing they was too busy to take any notice of him, he jist drove his hoss and gig right atween 'em. That sorter parted 'em, you see, but it didn't pay my uncle very well. Both the tigers went at the hoss he was driving, and ten minutes later, by the watch, there wasn't any thing left of him but his tail and one shoe. My uncle had put on his spectacles and leaned back in the gig, expecting to see the two beasts scatter like Satan, when they was shoved apart; but when the hoss-meat begun to fly, and one of the legs hit him in the face, he concluded it would be a good idea to adjourn his post of observation to some tree, and so he did; though when he got there, he hadn't any clothes left on him but his shirt-collar, and the button was off that.

"Since that time, the Whiffles family have been opposed to interfering in other folks' diffikilties. Me and the pup have traveled through the woods a good deal, and I don't like to hender his enjoyment, and he does seem to enjoy putting his teeth in the throat of a Modoc."

This lengthy observation was uttered with all the deliberation natural to the trapper, and while he stood within a half-dozen feet of the combatants, with the Modoc struggling desperately to save himself from the horrid death that threatened him.

The wretch saw that his only escape was in the mercy of the master; for the dog with his teeth closed like a vise in his throat, showed no disposition to relax his deadly gripe, which must speedily end in death, unless released very soon.

So he turned his protruding eyes toward the hunter, and moved one hand in supplication. Nick Whiffles was not cruel at heart and never could be. Accordingly, when his would-be assassin made the appeal for mercy, he stepped forward, and spoke sharply to Calamity.

"Let him go, pup, let him go! Because he got himself into a p'ison diffikilty, and axes us to help him out it won't do to refuse. Let him go, pup, let him go!"

Calamity had been taught from his earliest youth to obey his master implicitly. He had learned more than once that the hand that could cherish and lift up could chastise with severity, when it was deserved, and a word or look from his master, was always sufficient to insure instant attention; but he never hesitated as much as he did now to render that obedience, and it required a repetition of the command and a threatened blow, before he unclashed the powerful jaws and stepped back.

The would-be assassin was so near death that Nick stood looking at him a second or two, fully believing that his mercy had come too late; but, after some choking and gasping, he revived, and assumed a sitting position, pressing his hand to his throat and glaring with murderous hate upon the canine that had inflicted this terrible injury.

Espying his knife, near at hand, he reached out his hand to take it, but Nick Whiffles anticipated him, by planting his foot upon it.

"I guess not, Modoc," he said, as the red-skin looked up inquiringly at him.

"That 'ere knife got you into a p'ison diffikilty with the dog, and I'd advise you to let it alone arter this. I say, Flat-Nose, what did you mean by coming up behind me in that style, when it was only a little while ago that we shook hands?"

After some hard swallowing and choking, the Modoc was able to speak, and he told the following lie, which did not deceive the trapper for an instant.

"Marunyo, bad Indian. He tried to kill Captain Jack, and Captain Jack send warrior Billy to kill him."

Nick Whiffles might well have asked why, if he were seeking the life of the Blackfoot, he should steal up behind another person with a drawn knife; but he concluded for the present that it would be better to affect a belief of this transparent falsehood.

"If such was your idee, Modoc, the Blackfoot is here and you may have your knife and take it out with him, for he is here, while I look on and see that you both have fair play."

As Marunyo heard these words he stepped forward with his knife in hand, ready and eager to settle their 'diffikilty' then and there.

But such is not the style of Modoc warfare. He doesn't wish to meet his enemy face to face. It must be under the guise of a flag of truce, and while one lies concealed in his lava-bed, or when he can steal up behind him, as had just been attempted.

When Flat-Nosed Billy saw the dauntless young warrior standing before him, with his knife clasped in hand, he shook his head.

"Billy sick," he said, rubbing his throat and looking very sick indeed, "he can't fight to-day. He meet Blackfoot warrior some other day and fight him with knife and gun. He go now to great chief, Captain Jack."

"Modoc," said Nick Whiffles, speaking with impressive earnestness, "if it ever run in the Whiffles family to thirst for a fellow being's blood, it isn't in the branch that I have the honor to represent. It has fallen to the lot of this here rifle of mine to send many of your race to their happy hunting-grounds, but I kin truly say it was never done unless it had to be, and I can't help thinking that there's many a time when surciety would have been more benefited, if I had aimed and pulled trigger instead of resting in the holler of my arm. I never had any doubt about it, when the red-skin consarn was a Modoc, for though there ain't more nor about a hundred of 'em, counting in the squaws and pap-pooes, yet that's just a hundred too many, for the good of the Nor'-west. Fact, by mighty! There's sure to be some p'ison diffikilty with 'em tell the last one is wiped out from the face of the yarth."

"Flat-Nosed Billy, your name is a blamed sight more handsomer nor your face and heart is. You're one of the most p'isonest noosances of a lot that are all p'ison, and it goes ag'in' my conscience to show you mercy, when you've tried to sneak up behind me and stab me in the back. The rattlesnake allers sends you word afore he strikes, and once in a while you find a red-skin that does the same, but he don't belong to the Modocs. But as I observed a minit ago, I don't hanker arter your blood, so you kin go."

The Indian stood motionless while receiving this scorching at the hands of the trapper, and when it was finished the base wretch had the effrontery to advance and offer his hand to the trapper, as if desirous that he should forget the dastardly crime, which he had come so nigh perpetrating.

But Nick Whiffles recoiled and shook his head. I've allers tried to live in such a way that my dog there could respect as well as love me. He wouldn't do neyther if he should see me shake hands with a Modoc, and as it is, it'll take some time afore he'll forgive me for dragging him away from your throat. Take my advice, Modoc, and clear out afore it's too late."

Flat-Nosed Billy did not repeat his proffer, but turned on his heel and disappeared in the wood without giving utterance to another word.

CHAPTER VII.

MODOC WARFARE.

As the treacherous Modoc moved away, Nick Whiffles turned to his dog:

"Foller him, Calamity, fur a little distance, but don't you tech him unless he turns to come back, and then you kin put your teeth in his throat and let 'em stick."

As the sagacious dog glided away like a shadow, the trapper turned to Marunyo, with his old, quizzical smile.

"I guess the purp won't forgit, but if he should happen to think the Modoc was meditating about coming back, I won't scold him too hard; and now, Blackfoot," he added, more seriously, "I've got a word with you. It don't run in the Whiffles family to speak with two tongues except my uncle, the traveler, who said he found it necessary now and then in his travels. In the first place, I want to know whether you knowed that p'ison Modoc was creeping up behind me afore I turned round to see how he and the pup was making out?"

Marunyo started as if he had been shot, as well he might at such a pointed question. Before he could reply, Nick added:

"I'll allow it's coming to a pretty sharp p'int to put such a question, but I may as well tell you that there are some things about you that I don't understand and don't exactly like. In the first place, every time I see you you're in your war-paint, and you have a habit of wandering down in the Modoc country as though you was on good terms with 'em. I'll allow that the way you stood up afore this sar-pint, when there's some signs of a condemned diffikilty atween you, showed that you've got the clear grit. You seem a leetle smazed at the way I'm talking, and mebbe you've got cause to be, but it's best that we should understand each other, and I tell you that Oregon Sol and me think about alike on such things, and I allow that the Englishman, Persimmons, would think the same, if he had enough sense to think as deep as that. Mebbe you're all right, and mebbe you ain't; I give you warning that if it proves that you're true blue, I'll take off my hat to you and ax your pardon; but if you try

any of the Modoc style of business, you needn't expect the marcy he got. I guess now we understand each other, and I hope there'll be no diffikilty atween us."

Marunyo stood like a carved statue during the utterance of these words. Several times he appeared on the point of speaking, but something appeared to prevent, and as silently as the assassin he turned about and disappeared in the gloom.

"Mebbe I done him onjustice," mused the trapper, as he found himself alone, "but that's the one onpleasant thing that belongs to the life of the hunter and the guide. I love the boy enough to wish to save him, if he has the heart of a Modoc, and the few words I said may be the means of keeping him from some deviltry that he has in mind. It has a bad look for him to stand facing me, with that Flat-Nose creeping up behind me and he never seeing him; but if I didn't hear him, I'll allow that it's possible that he didn't see him. It may be all right, and it may not."

As he turned to retrace his steps to camp, he caught a faint rustling near him, and turning his head, saw his dog, that instantly took his place at his side. It needed but a glance from his master to learn that he had not molested the assassin.

"Sorry for you," said Nick, as the two moved off together; "it allus grieves my heart to interfere with your pleasure, and I know that you feel mighty disappointed; but cheer up, pup, and console yourself with the thought that mebbe the day of reckoning is very close at hand. There ain't any diffikilty in this world but what there's some way out of it; the only trouble is that we can't allus see it. When my father had his house burned down three times he said there was some good in it, although he never was able to see exactly how it helped him along, as twice when it burned he hadn't got it insured, and the other time the insurance company bursted up afore he could get his pay out of 'em, but the advantage then was that the insurance men made a good thing of it."

"A Modoc will allus act out his nature, and I make you the promise, pup, that the next time Flat-Nosed Billy tries to play that trick onto me, I won't interfere atween you and him, and I hope that will satisfy you, Calamity, and don't let me see you sulking any more over a trifle like this."

"See here," suddenly exclaimed Nick, "we've been a little longer away from camp than we expected, and I don't believe there's any supper left by this time. It won't be a bad idea for us to take a little with us any-way."

It required but a few moments to draw as many fish as he needed from the stream, and stringing these upon a stick he carried them back to camp, where, as may be supposed, his companions were beginning to wonder at his delay.

Oregon Sol was stretched upon the ground smoking his short clay pipe, and with his chin resting upon his hands, with his elbows jammed into the earth, and his eyes fixed upon the glowing coals, he looked as though he felt perfectly comfortable and happy.

Fitzsimmons was stretched in a lounging position with his side toward the fire, while he was attentively examining his microscope, as though it still contained mysteries which he was unable to fathom.

"The wonders of science are illimitable," he said, as if speaking to himself, but meaning that the others should hear his words. "Ignorant and coarse-minded men may scoff and ridicule, but they are only deserving of pity, because they are incapable of comprehending all the beauties of the glorious field that spreads out before them, and in which they may wander at will."

"Don't them chaps ever git in any diffikilty by going south in that field, when they think they're going north?" inquired Nick Whiffles, as he sat down and began raking the coals preparatory to broiling his fish.

The Englishman turned, and after looking with severe sternness at him for a moment, said, in his majestic way:

"Don't meddle with things of which you know nothing. Statements from ignorant men are always pitiful and ridiculous."

"I didn't make any statement, Persimmons; I only axed you a question; and I didn't know that science made people onpolite. When you got lost in the woods, while off on a scientific trip, and axed me and Sol the way, we took pity on you and showed it to you, and saved you from starving. Howsomever, you won't run any risk in going off for a month now, fur

I s'pose it's according to science that a barrel of fish will last a man a month, and that's about what you've got under your jacket now. It's lucky that I thought to catch a few extra ones, or I shouldn't had any supper."

"If you'd sent 'em on ahead you wouldn't," said Oregon Sol. "I was kept so busy cooking 'em that I hadn't much chance at anything, except the bones, and when there wasn't anything more left, he remarked that fish wasn't as plenty in these parts as he heard tell, but he guessed he had enough to stay his stomach till morning."

"Do you feel anyways faint?" continued Nick Whiffles, looking toward the disgusted Britisher with an expression of great solicitude.

Fitzsimmons waved them away, and made a reply which he intended to close their mouths and crush them completely.

"It's a well-settled fact in science that men who have large brains, and who use them much, require a great quantity of phosphorescence, such as is furnished by fish. The wonder to me is that two such gross-minded beings as you should ever feel the need of fish at all. As for me, I crave it constantly."

"Which nobody can deny," said Oregon Sol. "I never see'd such a craving afore. A couple of men like you would breed a famine in this North-west, if they stayed here one season."

The Englishman saw that it was useless to attempt to "chaff" with this wag, and so he bestowed his peculiar attention upon the little instrument, with its dancing needle, which he held in his hand.

Nick Whiffles turned toward his companion, and, as he ate his fish, related what had occurred upon the river, while he was absent.

Oregon Sol was greatly dissatisfied with the account. He knew Nick Whiffles's many peculiarities, but he did not suppose that any of them extended to the point of sparing the assassin whose arm was arrested just as he was in the act of driving the weapon home.

Furthermore, he believed it was a mistake in permitting Marunyo, the Blackfoot, to know that he was under suspicion, as it would put him on his guard and make it the more difficult to detect him in his treachery.

The trapper was unable to, appreciate the charity that really prompted Nick Whiffles to do this. He did not see that the notification was made with the express purpose of saving the young warrior before he implicated himself.

However, it was done now, and Oregon Sol was enough of a philosopher to see the folly of regretting it.

"Are you sartin that Flat-Nosed Billy or Captain Jack won't sneak up to us during the night?" he inquired.

"We'll fix it so they can't," was the reply. "I'll put Shagbark in one place, your animal in another, and let Calamity superintend the whole business, and if him or any other Modoc can git by them, he's welcome to the scalp of Nick Whiffles, which they are his sentiments."

"And I may as well express my sentiments," said Oregon Sol, in a low, but earnest voice, "which they are that if this is going to be your way of treating Modocs, you and I have got to part company mighty quick."

Nick Whiffles smiled as he made reply:

"That's all right, Sol; I told the varmint that I knowed I's making fool of myself as well as he did, and there won't be any more such business going on, so don't let us hear any more about it. I had enough diffikilty in getting the other pup out of the sulks, without bothering over you."

Oregon Sol finally yielded to the imperturbable good nature of his old friend, and as the night was pretty well advanced, the arrangements were completed for turning in.

The two sagacious animals were stationed as Nick Whiffles had hinted he meant to place them, and Calamity was made to understand how great responsibility rested on his shoulders.

"I don't know what we'll do with him," remarked Nick, when these arrangements were all made and they had come back to camp. He referred to the Englishman, who was still stretched upon the ground, studying his compass. "He's big 'nough to know how to take care of himself, but then he don't seem to know 'nough after all."

Very properly the scientific Britisher paid no attention to such ill-mannered slurs as these. He concluded that it would not pay to do so, and so he riveted his attention upon the little dancing needle before him.

The trappers did not hesitate to wrap themselves up in their blankets and stretch out upon the ground, where they almost immediately

sunk into deep slumber, which, unless disturbed, was certain to last until morning.

The Englishman continued to find instruction and delight in the little instrument before him for an hour longer, when he began to droop, and his head sunk upon the arm; so that when midnight came all three were sound asleep, and with no human being standing guard when they had received such evidence of their enemies being in the neighborhood.

At midnight the camp-fire was so low that the three figures were only dimly visible, as they lay stretched upon the ground. The trappers rested as quietly as infants, but Fitzsimmons emitted a snore that must have been audible for a hundred yards, and more, upon such a still night. It was its steady rise and fall that prevented its awaking the other sleepers.

Thus matters stood when another figure appeared upon the scene in the shape of the dog Calamity; who came from the wood like a shadow, with a slow, measured tread he advanced to where his master lay, and thrusting down his nose, rubbed it against his face.

"Wal, pup, what is it?" asked Nick Whiffles, arousing himself on the instant.

It would be hard to explain in what particular way the dog made his reply, but he did it so effectually that it was fully understood on the instant. It may have been (and very probably such was the fact) that the act itself of arousing his master indicated that something was amiss.

Nick reached over and touched the shoulder of Oregon Sol, who opened his eyes at once.

"I guess some of the varmint are about," whispered Whiffles, and without another word the two crawled away in the gloom, where they rose to their feet.

"Hadn't we better wake him?" asked Sol, referring to the Englishman.

"Not just yit; they must have heard him snoring as soon as they got within a mile of camp, and if he should stop all at once they'd know that we'd found 'em out."

Sol coincided with these views, and leaving the sleeper undisturbed, the trappers separated, taking nearly opposite directions.

Calamity accompanied his master, and had gone less than a hundred feet when he paused and stood like a dog pointing game.

The trapper did not speak, even in the lowest whisper, but looked and listened. The gloom was too great even for such keen eyes as his to penetrate, but his ears notified him that some one was advancing directly toward him.

As noiselessly as a shadow he stepped aside, and the next second a figure passed close enough almost to brush against him. Nick did not disturb him, but waiting to see whether there was any more, and finding none, followed him. He moved toward the camp-fire.

The strange Indian advanced in the same cautious manner until he was within a few feet, when he assumed a crouching position and began stealing toward the form of the sleeping Englishman.

Nick Whiffles waited until there could not be a possibility of a doubt of his intention, when he acted promptly and effectually.

A sharp crack of the rifle, and the red-skin, with a howl, fell prostrate on his face, stone dead, his outstretched arms touching the person of Fitzsimmons, who continued sleeping as soundly as ever.

"Watch out, pup," said Nick, as he hastily reloaded his piece, and then advancing to the camp he stirred up the fire.

"Nothin' on my side of the house," remarked Oregon Sol, as he came forward, and both trappers leaned over and scanned the figure, by the additional light thrown out by the embers.

"By mighty!" exclaimed Nick, as he identified the tribe of the red-skin, "it's another Modoc, as sure as I'm alive. What are so many of 'em doing in this part of the world?"

"And it ain't Captain Jack nor Flat-Nosed Billy, neyther; but it's one of them same varmints, sartin sure. Where do you s'pose he's come from?"

"He has been sent here by them two critters that went down the river in the canoe. Flat-Nosed was afeard to come himself, and so he sent this wretch."

"Tellin' him, I s'pose, that if he didn't make out to get his knife into you, you'd set him onto his feet and give him a 'chance to try ag'in."

Nick only smiled at this thrust, for he knew he deserved it; and after scanning the features of the assassin for a few minutes longer, he remarked:

"Never see'd him afore; have you, Sol?"

"Yes, I remember him. He and three others

murdered a family of settlers—man, wife and four children—near Klamath Lake, last summer. I happened to be in that neighborhood, just then, and started in pursuit of 'em; but they all got off in the lava-beds, where it was no use to try and follow 'em."

"If you didn't see him, how do you know that he's the animile?"

"Don't you observe that scar that runs across his face from one eye to the corner of the mouth on t'other side, taking in the lower part of the nose, on its way? There's Scar-Faced Charley, that is marked different, and this is the only one in this tribe that has such a scar. I've heard him spoke of a good many times, as one of the worst skunks in that little tribe, that hain't got any thing else in it but skunks. He got that hurt when he was trying to murder a white boy, as cotched up a hatchet and gave him a wipe across the face that laid him out fur a time. Wonder if there's any more of them critters 'bout?"

"Guess not. I think he's been sent here; but if there be any more, we kin depend upon Calamity more nor on ourselves."

They decided to remove the body, which was carried to the river and consigned to the rapid current, which speedily carried him beyond all human sight.

This done, the trappers returned to their positions by the camp-fire, where they stretched out and went to sleep as before, and seemingly forgetful of the frightful tragedy in which they had so recently acted a part.

Fitzsimmons did not open his eyes until after daylight, when the others were stirring, and as they told him nothing of what happened, he does not suspect, even to this day, how it was that Nick Whiffles was the means of saving him from a sudden and terrible death.

At an early hour the three resumed their journey northward, on their way to Blackfoot Rock.

CHAPTER VIII. THE FUR BRIGADE.

THE sun was low in the sky, on a beautiful day in summer, when a party of hunters, trappers and voyageurs, to the number of fifty odd, ran their half-dozen large canoes close to the shore, and springing out, began their preparations for the night encampment.

They were in British territory, and were on their return to Fort Alfred, having been absent from the post for several months, employed in making their tour along the Saskatchewan and tributaries, for the purpose of gathering in the furs and peltries that their agents had been collecting during the winter months.

They had secured a large and valuable collection, too, most of the canoes being piled high with the soft, velvety furs, which offered the most pleasant of couches, where, at night in midsummer, the air was cool and bracing. In some of the boats there was scarcely room for the rowers, while the rich burdens bore all down in the water within a few inches of the gunwales.

On the morrow the hardy woodmen expected to reach the fort, and this halt was, as we have intimated in another place, in accordance with an agreement made between Nick Whiffles and Captain Green, the leader of the Hudson Bay Brigade. The mutual pledge was given, half a year before, that on this night the company of trappers were to encamp at Blackfoot Rock, or, in case they could not make it in time, Captain Green agreed to have a representative upon the spot, to receive the message of Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol, and pay them the stipulated price.

By a coincidence that was remarkable, when the length of the time is considered, the brigade, as they were termed, had struck the place on the very day agreed upon, and Captain Green was not a little pleased at the neat manner in which it had been brought about.

Of the two score and a half of men, there was not one who did not know what his duty was, and who did not set about it at once. They were as busy as bees, and it was a pleasant sight to note the perfect system that reigned over all. While some devoted themselves to the care of the boats with their precious cargoes, guarding against any mishap of the night, in the way of storm, wind or thieves, others began cutting down and gathering fuel for the large camp-fires that were soon kindled, and throwing out a broad, cheerful circle of light in the darkening gloom of the night. Still others could be noticed bringing cooking utensils and boxes containing the most indispensable condiments from the boats, and perfecting their arrangements for the preparation of the food

for the wolf-like appetites of these brawny Anaks of the North-west.

Captain Green, the director and head of all this bustle and work, stood near one of the camp-fires, watching the movements of his men, and exchanging a word now and then with a young gentleman standing beside him.

The latter was the son of the commandant of Fort Alfred, and was a "city chap," who had come from London in the same vessel that brought over Mr. Fitzsimmons. He had little taste for the life of the backwoods, and had declared almost before he had seen the frontier post over which his father presided, that he meant to get back to London and civilization as speedily as possible. As several months must necessarily elapse before he could return in the supply ship of the Company, he consented to go with his friend Fitzsimmons on a tour with the brigade. At the time the scientific gentleman got lost, young Swoper was temporarily absent on a hunt, or he would have got lost with him.

Swoper was rather conceited, and treated the hunters with such undisguised contempt, that he was not popular with them, and even Captain Green only endured him for the sake of his father. They had not much liking for Fitzsimmons, but he was not as offensive in his manner as the young cockney.

Captain Green stood somewhat apart from the others, and he would have preferred to stand alone, but as he was about the only one who would hold any converse with Swoper, and that young gentleman was there, he could not well afford to dismiss him.

The captain had just made some response to some observation of his companions, when the latter exclaimed:

"Helloa, 'ere is my friend, as sure as I'm alive. I'm dooced glad to see 'im, but who the dooce hare them beggars that he 'as with 'im?"

"Be careful," admonished the leader, as he turned and recognized the men approaching. "One of them is known as Oregon Sol, a somewhat celebrated trapper, and the other is the famous philosopher and hunter, Nick Whiffles, that you have heard me speak of so often."

"O—o! and that's the man," replied the cockney, elevating his eye-brows with surprise; "he don't look like much of a feller."

As the trio approached, there was naturally hand-shaking all around, and an exchange of courtesies between the two Londoners who had been separated for the past few days. Then followed several introductions, and while Oregon Sol sauntered off to exchange greetings and renew acquaintances with the members of the brigade, and those who remained behind paired off, Fitzsimmons and Swoper, and Captain Green and Nick Whiffles, the young cockney showed considerable curiosity regarding the famous trapper philosopher, and asked numerous questions of Fitzsimmons about him. He kept his eye upon him, and when he saw the captain pay him a handsome sum of money, in recognition of his services, he seemed to think it was a suitable occasion to open a conversation with him.

"And so you trappers work for money, do you? 'I thought you tramped the woods and shot bears and trapped beavers and halligators, and I don't know what not, for the love of the thing."

Nick Whiffles turned about and looked steadily at the young man a moment, as if to take his measure. It required but a few seconds for him to do so, when he made answer in his drawing way:

"Bears and beavers would be easy 'nough cotched, if they was all as big fools as you are. But as there ain't a beaver in the Nor'-west but what has more brains than you have, you see there is more work than play about it. Fact, by mighty!"

Captain Green and Fitzsimmons both laughed at this rather personal reply of Nick, uttered with such an irresistible waggishness. Swoper flushed, and showed that he was angered. Instead of laughing the whole thing off, and backing out of such an unequal contest, he was only the more eager to overthrow his antagonist.

"You are doubtless unaware 'of whom you're haddressing, sir. 'I would 'ave you know that 'I'm 'erbert Swoper, son 'of the commandant 'of Fort 'Alfred."

"You be, eh?" returned Nick, scanning him from head to foot. "Colonel Swoper is a man, every inch of him, and when you tell me you're his son, I can't help thinking what a double shame you commit; for you derive distinction from your ancestor, as it were, and bequeath disgrace to your posterity—that is, if you ever have any, which the good Lord forbid!"

Young Swoper was compelled to hear the snicker of his friends again, and he hastened to drown it in some more original observations. The height of his ability enabled him to ask a few questions in the way of quizzing, as he had frequently done at home among his companions. This, the resort of the weakest wits, he proceeded to carry out, by making his questions as irrelevant and absurd as possible, in the hope of compelling the trapper to appear ridiculous.

"Do you gentlemen 'ave good appetites?"

"Good appetites allers run in the Whiffles family, but the biggest hogs I ever see'd was the Englishmen that sometimes come over with the Hudson Bay folks. Howsumever, appetite is a good thing, which Providence generally gives to poor folks, so that they may like what they eat, while the rich don't often have it, 'cause they may eat what they like."

"You are quite a remarkable philosopher," said Swoper, in mock compliment. "Such a man as you ought to travel and let the world see more of you."

Nick Whiffles shook his head.

"The objection to that is that I'd see more fools than I would wise men. Out here in the woods, when I don't meet one of my own race and color sometimes for days and weeks, I begin to think that there ain't a great many fools and scamps of my own race arter all; but the minit I approach a dozen or twenty white men, I'm sure to run ag'in one of them chaps that are like the skunks—good for nothin' except to smell sweet and strong. No matter if it's the brigade away up here in the Nor'-west, that fool is sure to turn up. But then I had an uncle once that was a great traveler."

"Ah—a! you did. What part of the world did he visit?"

"Every part, I may say, and when he come back he writ a book about 'em. There was China, now, I call to mind what he said about that."

"You do, eh? what did he write about that?"

"He said it was the land of contraries. That flowers didn't have any smell, and that female ladies didn't wear any petticoats; the roads didn't have any carriages, and their ships were like our canoes, without any keels; the old men fly kites, and thar compasses all p'int south, though, fur that matter, they don't p'int north in this part of the world, as Persimmons there has found out. When a man in China gets puzzled he never scratches his head, where if you take off your hat you insult a man, and when you want to go in mourning you put on white duds."

"Well done," added Fitzsimmons, enthusiastically; "there's more in your head than there looks to be. You've come in contact before with men who have made some investigations in science and history. What you've said I can certify as being truth."

"Sorry you said that," replied Nick, "'cause I never had any doubt of what my uncle, the traveler, writ till you throwed it on by what you've just said. I hope this other pup won't say he agrees with me, for then I'll be sartin that some of the Whiffles family have told a lie."

"I guess you two gentlemen had better let Nick alone," laughed Captain Green, who thoroughly enjoyed the discomfiture of the two would-be wits. "You can't make anything off of him, and the more you try the worse you catch it."

"'I aren't 'alf tried," replied Swoper, pompously; "if Mr. Whiffles was a man of some heducation, 'I shouldn't be afraid to measure swords with 'im; but it's 'ard to talk to a man that 'asn't the brains to comprehend you."

"Then I s'pose you allus have an uncommon diffikilty in talking with any one," said the trapper, "'specially if he's a man of sense. Some folks are the wisest when they're asleep or dreaming."

"Do you hever hindulge in the luxury of dreams?" asked Swoper, catching him up instantly. "What do you know of dreams?"

"I don't pretend to much book-l'arning," said Whiffles, more seriously than before; "but a man can't come to my age, even though he spends most of his time in the woods, without l'arning something. God and Nature are allus before him, and he sees 'em when his eyes are shet; they foller him everywhere, and he can't forget 'em in his sleep. You ax me what I know 'bout dreams, and I can't say that I know much, 'cause nobody does; but my dreams are mostly pleasant, which I fear yours ain't, 'cause it takes a good digestion and a clear conscience to make 'em so. Dreams are the visions we are awake to when we're asleep. They're the life of death; the sights that the blind see; the sounds that the deaf hear; the language

of the dumb; and to me they're dim speakings of what is to come in that sleep which knows no waking. I've read somewhere that sleep was the twin brother of death—"

"What do you mean by a twin brother?" was the exceedingly silly question of Swoper, intended to cast ridicule upon the "old man eloquent."

"If your mother had been so unfortunite as to have a natural born fool, at the same time you come into the world, you and him would have been twin brothers, and the other one would have had the most sense. And now, young man, let me give you a word of advice; you never will amount to much, and it ain't your fault, 'cause it wasn't born in you; you're one of them chaps that thinks it's a disgrace to work, and I don't doubt despise your own parents 'cause they do it. Idleness is the hardest work for them that ain't used to it, and dull work to them that are. It's a disease that soon eats into the heart, and corrodes your heart while it digs under your health. Depend upon it, that nothing is so hard to do, as to do nothing. Men spend years in working for the time when they needn't work, and then find that the hardest work of all, and—but what's the use in talking to a man that can't understand?"

And Nick Whiffles deliberately turned his back upon the two Englishmen, and began a confidential conversation with Captain Green, as though his disgust was too great to permit him to look upon them even.

They sauntered away arm in arm, as though they were the victors instead of the vanquished, though there can be but little doubt that they were greatly relieved to escape the scathing they were receiving at the hands of Nick Whiffles.

CHAPTER IX. THE FIRST TRAMP.

EARLY in the morning the brigade had eaten their breakfast, and were ready to start on their return to Fort Alfred. Captain Green was desirous of securing the services of Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol for the Hudson Bay Company, but the former shook his head.

"I've got a little private business of my own to look arter. If nothing pertickler comes up in the summer and fall—that is if I don't run across any condemned diffikilties that I have to straighten out, I'll turn in with you and try another season."

None knew better than Captain Green that it was useless to attempt to change the mind of Nick, and so he urged him no further, but bidding the two trappers good-by, told them that he should count with a great deal of confidence upon seeing them at the fort before a year should have elapsed.

As the canoes pulled away up-stream, Nick and Sol stood upon the shore waving their good-by. They were especially affectionate in their demonstrations toward Swoper and Fitzsimmons, who had sense enough to forget the rough treatment they had received at the hands of the philosopher of the woods, and they returned the signals, declaring the old fellow to be a brick after all.

And so the parties separated.

When the brigade had passed the curve in the river and was fairly out of sight, Nick turned about, and the two walked to where their horses were cropping the grass. Here they stood beside them for some minutes debating as to their future movements.

"I told the Blackfoot to meet me here this morning," said Nick Whiffles, "and he hasn't kept his agreement as well as Captain Green and the rest of the men done."

"Mebbe he won't come at all," replied Oregon Sol, who had received the full particulars of the last interview between Marunyo and his friend. "When a red-skin gits his back up in that style, he's apt to show it, and like enough we'll never see the red-skin ag'in."

"That might be," replied Nick, "if he was a ginooine Injun; but it's the condemned diffikilty fur me to think all the time that he's one of the true blue. There's something in his ways that looks too much like a white man's."

Oregon Sol's face wore a serious expression. He was silent a moment, and then looking up, he said:

"Nick, I've never heard you speak that way afore. I've had sech thoughts, but I never let 'em out 'cause they seemed so foolish like, but thar's something else 'bout Marunyo that works me more nor his looks do."

"What's that?" inquired Whiffles, with no little curiosity.

"Sometimes, when he's speaking, there's something that comes over me, as though I had heard that voice before. I've had the feeling a good

many times, and it bothers me a good deal, fur I can't figure out where it was that I heerd that voice, nor how it is that it strikes me that way. Does it ever act the same with you?"

Nick shook his head.

"Never; I've had my doubts 'bout his being a reg'lar varmint, and I've got 'em yit, but I've never had a s'picion that I've ever see'd 'im afore the time we run ag'in 'im, a couple of years ago."

"I wish I could feel the same way," said Oregon Sol, as if speaking to himself, "fur it's one of them things that sometimes keeps me from sleeping at all. How long are you going to wait here?"

"We'll hold on a little while longer, and then, if we don't see nothin' of him we'll head south and leave word for him to foller. Calamity, I wish you'd go over on Blackfoot Rock and see whether the young man is in sight. You've been up there before and know the way."

The large shaggy dog that was sitting at his master's feet, licking his chops, and patiently awaiting their decision, arose, turned about, and trotted toward the river. There was a solemnity in his movement and action, that proved that he was a canine little given to trifling, and without any evidence of the waggish disposition that was such a prominent characteristic of his master.

Into the river went the dog, and paddled as straight for the opposite shore, as if he was following a ferry line that was stretched over his head. As he walked out upon the land he paused only long enough to shake his shaggy hide, when he disappeared behind the huge mass of rock towering to such a great height.

"Can he get to the top?" asked Oregon Sol, who had been attentively watching the movements of the sagacious creature.

"You heerd me tell Captain Green how many times I have been up there myself," said Nick, in reply. "Well, every time I went up the pup went with me, and I guess he's old 'nough to go it alone."

It was no light task for any one, man or animal, to clamber to the top of Blackfoot Rock, but the trapper never felt the least doubt about the success of his favorite.

Several minutes passed, and while they stood discussing the many excellences of Calamity, a faint bark was heard, far up in the air, and looking up they saw the diminutive figure of the dog on the highest point of Blackfoot Rock. At such a distance, he appeared scarcely larger than a fly, but there could be no mistake about his identity.

The creature retained his position perhaps ten minutes, during which he gave out his short, peculiar bark, some half-dozen times.

"That means that he sees something," said Nick, who understood the meaning of his dog, as well as if he possessed the gift of speech. "I guess the Blackfoot isn't fur away."

Shortly after, Calamity was seen breasting the current again, and, as he came out, and gave his hide a shake that sent the water and spray flying in every direction, Nick Whiffles put to him a series of questions, as searching as if the dog were submitting to a cross-examination upon the witness stand.

"Marunyo is close by," said the trapper, looking about, as if he expected him to show himself at once; "the pup has seen him, and we sha'n't have to wait long."

"That's the fact," said Oregon Sol, "for there he is this minute."

The handsome, graceful figure of the Blackfoot emerged from the woods at this juncture, and he advanced straight to them, making a kind of military salute, to the two trappers.

"Well, Marunyo, we came near giving you up," said Nick Whiffles, as he took his hand. "We've been here all night, and was just talking about going away, when you showed yourself."

"Marunyo has been a good many miles," replied the Blackfoot, by way of explanation, "and he has lot shut his eyes for a long time that he might meet his brothers."

This did not look as though he was very deeply offended at the plain words that had been spoken to him by Nick, and the latter, with characteristic good sense, determined to make no reference to it.

"Wal, my son, the next question is whether all this tramping that you've been telling us 'bout has done you any good. Have you l'arned any thing 'bout the two females that Captain Jack and Flat-Nosed Billy took away with 'em in the canoe?"

The black eyes of the young Indian flashed, as he made answer:

"Marunyo has followed them as the hound

follows the deer. He has found the place where the Drooping Lily weeps."

"That's the kind of talk that amounts to something," I s'pose the old lady is with the Drooping Lily?"

Marunyo nodded in the affirmative.

"I observe that it's the young gal that you speak 'bout, as though her mother wasn't of much account. Don't you forgit, young man, that if that gal is the right kind of animile in calico she thinks a good deal of her mother, and it wcn't do fur you to furgit all 'bout the old lady when you're courting the young one."

Marunyo showed considerable confusion at the pointed references of the trapper—but he made no allusion to them. He was too much occupied just then with the question of the rescue of the ladies from the power of the murderous-minded Modocs.

"Will the hunters go with me to save the Drooping Lily?"

"And her mother, too," added Nick, in his comical way. "You nod your head that you mean her—but it's time you begun practicing in the way of showing some thought of her, even if you haven't got it."

Nick turned to Sol, as if he wished him to answer the question of the young Blackfoot.

The former stood back a little, with his arms folded, and looking fixedly at the young man, as if studying his countenance and listening to his voice.

When appealed to in this manner, he did not speak, but nodded his head to signify that he was willing to do whatever his companion wished him to do, and Nick Whiffles took upon himself to reply for both.

Laying his hand upon the shoulder of Marunyo, he fixed his keen gray eyes upon him, and said:

"Blackfoot, we're going to trust you; and when I say *we*, I mean the pup and Shagbark the pony, not to mention Oregon Sol. If you talk with two tongues, we'll diskiver it in time to put you in such a condemned p'ison diffikilty that you'll never tramp the woods ag'in nor think you hear the voice of Drooping Lily singing to you, when you're looking at the stars. We've waited here on purpose to meet you, and we are going to do what we can to git them females out of diffikilty. It's airy in the day, and if you feel like travelin', go ahead, and we'll foller."

The war-paint that covered the face of the Blackfoot could not conceal the expression of delight that came over it when he heard these words from Nick Whiffles, and saw from the manner of the two trappers that they were as ready as he to start on the expedition.

Marunyo was without any animal of his own, and he needed none. Young and active, almost tireless in muscle and wind, he could travel as far, at a moderate speed, as the best horse that he could ride.

As he moved away the hunters mounted their animals and followed after him in Indian file. Calamity took his place directly in front of Shagbark, the pony, and a few feet in the rear of the Blackfoot. By this means he could give his master timely warning of any danger that the red-skin might lead them into, and Nick understood the sagacious animal well enough to know that he would do it, as surely as if a human being himself.

Oregon Sol kept a rod or so in the rear, and an ordinary observer would have supposed it was on account of timidity; but Nick knew better. He was well aware that his old companion was in one of his *moods*, and he respected his feelings enough at such a time to make no attempt to disturb him.

If Nick Whiffles could be waggish and humorous at times, he could be considerate also. He never willingly injured a person's feelings, and in quizzing a person he did it in such a way that he could take no offense, unless, indeed, the other first attacked him, as was the case with Swoper, the Englishman, when the old trapper was as severe as any one could wish.

He had learned, during his companionship with Oregon Sol, that the latter, like most people, had his secret sorrow. He had suffered a blow in his early manhood, which had been the real means of his taking to the woods. Precisely what it was Nick could not tell, for he had never asked; but he needed no telling that it was the cause of these spells of absent-mindedness, and occasional moroseness, that came over his friend. At such times Nick generally left him alone. He felt enough sorrow and sympathy for him to make proper allowances for his change of mood, and he did not add to it by any unseemly jest or resentment upon his part.

If the Blackfoot had traveled so many miles

during the days and nights passed—and Nick Whiffles did not doubt in the least that he had done so—he showed no signs of it, as he led the way with a free, bold step, apparently as fresh and vigorous as if he had merely started out this fine summer morning for the purpose of stretching his legs.

The trapper had seen thousands of Indians, and some of the finest specimens of mankind probably that ever lived, yet he was certain that he never beheld greater perfection of form, and grace of movement than was in Marunyo, who strode along before, seemingly unconscious of his beauty, power, and wonderful reserve of strength.

"It seems impossible that such a good-looking fellow as that can be a villain," muttered Nick to himself; "and yet that don't make no difference, for here is me, the best-looking member of the Whiffles family, when I was young I was one of the worst boys in the kentry, though I've got over it now and am just t'other way."

After following a southern direction for many hours, Marunyo turned more to the east, where the way was rougher and their progress was more difficult. In some places it required considerable skill on the part of the horses to pick their way along the rocks and through the gorges and ravines.

But the Blackfoot appeared never to hesitate or to be at a loss for the proper course to pursue. He led the way as though he had spent his life among the mountains and knew every step of the way.

"I s'pected he would aim for this neighborhood," said Nick, who, having no one to whom he might talk, spent the time in talking to himself. "Captain Jack knows this part of the country well enough to know where to hide his jewels. I s'pect that old sinner has stowed them gals away here, where he means to keep 'em till he kin get a big ransom for 'em. That old dog is as smart as he is devilish."

As the day advanced Nick Whiffles proffered to Marunyo the use of his horse and urged upon him to ride awhile, but the Indian would not consent, and they continued plodding along until the day was nearly ended.

At night they encamped in one of the wildest places of the North-west—so walled in on every side by mountains and broken forests that in scarcely any direction was it possible to gain a view of more than a hundred yards.

Nick Whiffles had been in this section but once before, and that was at least a dozen years previous, so that, although he retained a general knowledge of its characteristics, yet, as he declared, he felt more like a stranger than he had felt for a long time.

"But," said the Blackfoot, "we are now within half a mile of where the Drooping Lily and her mother sigh and weep and pray for the coming of their friends."

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

NICK WHIFFLES, understanding the nature of the business upon which they were engaged, had provided himself and the others with a good lunch at the hands of the brigade before they left Blackfoot Rock. This obviated all necessity of firing a gun, for some time at least to come, while they were in proximity to their foes. Silence and caution were the most important requisites toward success just now, and the three men realized the truth to its fullest extent.

Marunyo proposed, as they came to a halt, that they should not kindle a fire; but both Nick and Sol had such a distaste for encamping in the darkness, that they searched out a sheltered nook under the rocks, which was really more of a cavern than anything else, and here they kindled a small fire, which enabled them to see each other's faces and to converse more understandingly of the position in which affairs stood.

Whiffles had supposed from the remarks of the Blackfoot that he knew precisely where the prison place of the captives was; but upon close inquiry he found that such was not the case.

He had followed Captain Jack, and Flat-Nosed Billy to this section, but had lost them, and with all the skill at his command could not tell whither they had gone, or where they had been previous to their departure for home again, during which the attempt upon the life of Nick Whiffles was made; but, convinced that the spot he was seeking was somewhere in this neighborhood, he had made a careful search without any success except to discover that when Captain Jack and his companion left, others remained behind to take their places. They were among the mountains somewhere,

and were doubtless guarding these women with the greatest care.

"That's it," said Nick, when he had drawn all these particulars from the Blackfoot. "Captain Jack has got so much deviltry on his hands that he has gone to 'tend to it, and has left two or three Modocs here to stand guard over the gals till he is ready to visit 'em ag'in. I say, Marunyo, do you know the name of these critters?"

"De Long," was the prompt reply.

"Old acquaintances of yours? That is, did you know 'em afore they got into this little diffikilty?"

The answer to this was equally as ready:

"Captain De Long is rich man; his home is in Frisco; he is fine man. He brings his wife and daughter in Oregon to see their friends; they stay here when the weather is warm in summer time; they go fishing; they hunt. Marunyo sometimes go with them. He goes off to start them a deer, and comes back and they are gone. Captain Jack has stolen them; he takes them far away in the mountains, where he hides them. Then he will send word to Captain De Long that he can have wife and Drooping Lily for big sum of money; he wait a while, and if captain not send the money, then he kill them."

"And if he can git hold of the money before he lets go the gals, he'll kill 'em then, too. He will, by mighty! That's the Modoc of it; so the safest plan is for us to git them away while he is gone."

"So I think," said the Blackfoot, eagerly.

"What think you?"—to Oregon Sol.

The latter was leaning upon his elbow, snoking his pipe, and had rallied from the gloomy reverie into which he had fallen. He nodded his head in acquiescence, and removing his pipe, added:

"Seems to be sartin that the critters are somewhere in this part of the world. With the help of the pup there we kin soon find out to-morrer, and then we'll sail in."

Nick Whiffles shook his head, as if he was not exactly suited with the reply.

"It won't do to go into that kind of business, Sol," he said: "it would make a condemned diffikilty. When one of the red varmints finds he can't keep his prisoners, then he puts his tomahawk into their skulls, and I reckon Marunyo here ain't trying to get Drooping Lily, unless she's got some breath in her body."

The Blackfoot shuddered at the bare suggestion, while his fine dark eyes flashed.

"It must not be; it must not be."

"That's my opinion, Sol, and yours, too, as you come to think over it."

"Of course," returned the trapper. "How many of the varmints do you s'pose there is keeping watch over the gals?"

"Two or three, I should think. We've got to get 'em away, or manage to steal on 'em so sly like that they won't get a chance to kill 'em. It's likely if they don't s'pect some of us are about, they'll scatter, and while one or two hang round the gals, the others will be off on a hunt or fish; that's the way we want things fixed, and we'll be a set of the cussedest fools if we don't put this little business through in the right kind of style."

"We'll be likely to have some trouble in getting 'em down to Frisco; for you see it's a long way from here, and we shall have the Modocs arter us all the way."

"That'll be the easiest part of the business; for I think when Oregon Sol and Nick Whiffles git in the woods they are at home, and if I can't throw a pack of Modocs off the trail, if I've 'n'ugh start to git out of their sight fur half an hour, then I'll commit suicide for grief, as an aunt of mine did when she met an ancient lady at a party who was able to drink three more cups of tea than she was, and that was better posted in the gossip of the neighborhood."

"Don't you think that Captain Jack, if he hain't already come back here, will do so, arter seeing the Blackfoot, and arter finding out that it's likely some of us has tollored him to this place?"

"I don't believe the captain will, 'cause he never likes to be away from the main body of his tribe for any time; but it's very likely that Flat-Nosed Billy isn't many miles away from us just now."

"Of course, sence Captain Jack has found out that this pertik'ler devil of his is sartin to receive all kinds of favors, he's jist the sarpint he's going to send along to look out for us. He'd be a fool if he didn't."

"Easy, now," replied Nick Whiffles, with a grin and a deprecatory wave of the hand.

"That 'ere little episode is buried in the vister of the past, as the poets say. Don't fotch it up ag'in until arter this business is settled."

Oregon Sol understood the meaning of this hint, and perhaps it was this, or it may have been the recollection that Nick himself had been considerate toward him when he was in no humor for jesting, that caused him to desist from chaffing his friend when such a good opening was given.

As it was, they settled down into a more serious discussion of the prospects, and they perfected all their arrangements for the morrow. It was agreed that at daybreak they should separate, and spend the entire day in reconnoitering through the mountains, unless they should sooner succeed in effecting their object. As it was believed to be more than likely that either the hiding-place would be discovered or some of the Modocs encountered, a system of signals was agreed upon, which they were confident could be employed without their meaning being suspected by the red-skins.

Above all things, it was important that the presence of the three men in the mountains should not become known to the Indians. It was understood by each that, in case any untoward accident should reveal their presence to one of these devils, that same personage was to be wiped out without the least ceremony, upon the well-established adage that dead men tell no tales.

During this conversation, the dog Calamity lay stretched near the fire, with his nose between his feet, and apparently sound asleep; but all knew that he understood very nearly as well as they the important matter which they were discussing.

As proof of this, when Sol proposed to send the canine out on his own hook to prosecute the search for the Modoc hiding-place, the pup raised his head and looked at the speaker with an expression that seemed as intelligent as that of any person.

Nick was inclined to adopt the plan when it was first suggested, but he afterward concluded to let him keep company with him. It was understood that, if no important discovery were made, they were all to meet in the present place at nightfall; while, if any one should gain the intelligence that all were seeking, he was to summon the others around him by one of the many signals agreed upon.

Thus matters were discussed until a late hour, when all three turned in for the night. The fire was nearly out, and Calamity stretched himself in front of them, while the two horses were grazing so close at hand that none of the sleepers had any fear of being disturbed during the night by their enemies.

The three men were unusually tired, and they slept heavily. The sagacious dog seemed to understand their condition, for he was restless and watchful. Could he have been seen in the darkness, it would have been noticed that he frequently raised his head and snuffed the air, as though he scented some sort of danger which he did not precisely understand.

Then, after lying motionless for a few minutes, seemingly asleep, he would suddenly start up, as if disturbed by some bad dream. After walking around the sleepers several times, he would come back and lie down again.

As yet no alarm had come from the two horses, that had ceased grazing, and were both reposing upon the ground, and Calamity, like his master, appeared to rely in some degree on their sagacity, to aid him in his duties as sentinel.

Thus matters went on until past midnight, when Shagbark gave out the slightest possible sound. It was not a neigh, nor a whinny, but seemed to have been made by the motion of one of his hoofs, as he lay upon the ground.

Slight as it was, it caught the ear of Calamity, who was on his feet as quick as a flash. Instead of alarming the three men over whom he was standing guard, he whisked out in the darkness toward the spot where the two horses were stretched.

There was a certain friendly familiarity between these two dumb servants of Nick Whiffles. As Calamity came up, he rubbed his nose against the long head of Shagbark, who bent his nose down as if to invite it.

Thus they remained for several minutes, communicating with each other in that language of their own which is so readily understood by each other, but which is a "sealed book," and will probably always remain such, to the greatest human linguist.

When this sort of billing and cooing had continued some minutes, the dog turned about and walked away in the darkness, taking a direction

different from that leading to the spot where his three friends were sleeping. After his departure, all remained silent for several minutes, and then was heard a sudden fierce struggle, as if two animals had grasped in a deadly embrace and were rolling over and over among the stones and leaves. Once or twice a low growl, as if made by Calamity, might have been heard, and then all was still.

Only a few seconds did this strange, savage fight continue, when the dog emerged from the dense darkness, entered the cavern, and resumed his place as sentinel. All this was done so quietly, that not one of the three men stirred in his sleep, or gave evidence of the slightest disturbance. The dog lay with his nose resting on his paws, apparently in as deep slumber as any of them, but he was alive to the responsibility that rested upon him, and he had already proven how keen the vigilance was which he maintained in this lonely but dangerous region.

The three men sorely needed such refreshing sleep as this, and the two horses reposing so quietly upon the ground were scarcely less fatigued, so that it was a fortunate thing for all that, as the hours of the night wore away, they suffered no further disturbance, and it was not until the morning sun sent its rays into the ravine, in front of their quarters, that they opened their eyes, and roused from their slumber.

Nick Whiffles's knowledge of his dog Calamity was so intimate and perfect that he knew the instant he cast his eyes upon him, that something unusual had occurred during the night, and he determined of him what it was. The canine, by way of reply, led him a hundred yards, beside a mass of rocks and stones, where was stretched the lifeless figure of a Modoc.

"What I suspected," said the hunter, to his faithful animal; "it's been some of them varmints that has happened down in these parts, and seeing our light has stole up to find out what mischief there was about. You knowed we was tired and didn't want to 'sturb us, so you wiped him out yourself. Wal, it was very clever to us, pup, though it wasn't quite so clever to the varmint, as he would testify, if he had the chance, and I hope it's done you some good. I've noticed you've been sulkin' for the last day or two, on account of the condemned fool I made of myself in letting off Flat-Nosed Billy when you had him foul, but," continued the trapper, as seriously as if he were pleading his own case in court, "I explained the whole thing to you, and wanted that to be the end of it. So now, pup, how do you want it to be?"

Calamity frisked around in such a way that there could be no mistake about his good nature, and his master smiled in a fashion which showed that he was fully as much pleased.

"That makes things square, then," he added, as they began retracing their steps toward the cavern, or rather, camp; "no more sulking, pup, 'cause you know I've told you afore of the terrible fate of one of the Whiffles family, that got so deep into the sulks that they had to hitch a couple of horses to him to pull him out. Fact, by mighty!"

When the little party had assembled in their cavern retreat, and Nick Whiffles had told the doings of Calamity, it was decided to send him out on a little scout of his own, while the rest were engaged with their morning lunch. He could easily ascertain whether they were under surveillance or not, and it was all-important that the matter should be settled on the spot. The dog was gone scarcely half an hour, when he trotted to view again, his actions and manner showing that he had found "the coast clear."

Nothing now remained to do except to set about the work that had brought them thither. No better place could be found for their horses, and they were left where they were, while the three men moved out upon their stealthy search, separating immediately and moving with such celerity that in the space of three minutes all were lost to sight of each other.

We leave Marunyo and Oregon Sol for the present, and follow Nick Whiffles and his dog Calamity, as fortune had willed that they were to open the curious events that were so soon to transpire.

It may be said that each of the three devoted himself with all the energy and skill at his command to finding out where among the mountains around them the captives were hid, for by this time they had all settled down to the conviction that it was somewhere close at hand.

Neither Marunyo nor Oregon Sol were in the best condition possible to prosecute his peculiar work. The former was so nervous over the certainty that he felt at being so near the object of his love, and the latter was so "flustered" at some strange thoughts that had begun to

agitate him, that they were not likely to do themselves justice in the emergency that was likely to come upon them at any moment.

And so it was fortunate that it came to the lot of Nick Whiffles, who was as cool and collected as he always was, to unravel some of the mystery by which he was surrounded.

Nick, assisted by Calamity, spent many hours in the search, but when noon came and passed, neither dog nor master had made the slightest advance toward the discovery which all three were so anxious to make.

Nick had not forgotten the system of signals that had been agreed upon, and now and then he communicated with Marunyo and Oregon Sol, but from neither came any message denoting progress.

Thus matters stood, and the afternoon was pretty well advanced, when Nick suddenly descried upon the rocks above him a small antelope that seemed to have paused and stood gazing into the depths below, without noticing the hunter and dog who had fixed their eyes upon him.

Nick was debating whether it would be prudent for him to risk a shot, when he caught the faint sound of a gun, and he saw the animal make a sudden desperate leap, falling lifeless to the ground almost at his very feet!

CHAPTER XI.

A SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE.

THE instant the antelope fell, a crushed and shapeless mass, to the bottom of the ravine, Nick Whiffles stepped back, concealed himself, and waited and watched.

He was not kept long in waiting, when he descried the Indian making his way among the rocks until he reached the place where the creature lay, over which he stooped and began cutting some select portions to take away with him.

"He's a Modoc," said Whiffles to himself; "and one of the very dogs I'm looking for. We'll foller him, pup."

This was a matter of considerable difficulty; but the trapper was accustomed to such work, and he set about it with all the skill of which he was master. It was really Calamity himself that was the pursuer, Nick sending him ahead, while he followed and kept himself out of sight of the Modoc, who would be much less likely to notice a quadruped than a biped.

The route led up among the wildest fastnesses of the mountains, and Nick was beginning to mutter to himself, and wonder whether he was going up among the clouds to find his friends, when the dog stopped with a low, almost inaudible whine.

"It's there, is it?" he exclaimed, looking about, and unable to see the Modoc, or any thing resembling a retreat or hiding-place.

He was near the highest portion of the mountains, with rocks and crags and stunted pines all around him; but, if there was any place in which a man could hide, he was determined to "root" it out.

The trapper had formed the conclusion, without any tangible ground to base it upon, that there were no more than three Modocs that had been left in charge of the captives by Captain Jack, and since the death of one of the number during the preceding night, there could be but two, unless Flat-Nosed Billy had returned. It followed, therefore, that if the guard could be engaged in a regular fight, there was no reason why they should hesitate to attack them; but it was like assailing a party within the walls of a fort, where every advantage was in their favor. In case the Modocs were driven to the wall, there was no question but what they would turn upon the females and put them to a horrible death. The object of Nick Whiffles, as a consequence, was to get in the "rear" of the red-skins, or between them and the captives, and prevent any such terrible *coup d'état* as this.

"Where is the spot that that varmint disappeared?" he asked of the dog, after both had stood several minutes, and the master was still unable to locate the vanishing-point of the red-skin.

The dog replied in the most intelligible language at his command. His nose was pointed as rigidly as a ramrod toward the broken rocks that rose beyond and above them, and he gave out a low whine to signify that he was pointing at the very spot where the man had been last seen.

"I'll be skulped if there ain't another condemned difficulty," growled the impatient trapper. "This must be the place where my uncle found his real estate located among the clouds."

The only conclusion that he could come to was that the Modoc had clambered up among the rocks and gone on beyond and behind them; but if such were the case, the action of Calamity was altogether out of keeping with the sagacity which he was accustomed to display.

Nick Whiffles scratched his head and looked at the dog, and then looked at the rocks and didn't know how to explain it.

"That's jist the place for one of them critters to lay flat down on his belly and pick off a gentleman like me as he undertakes to walk up in a square fashion, and I'll be condemned if I want to try it. Why don't you move on, pup?"

But the dog refused to budge an inch, and growing impatient at the passage of time, and the failure to accomplish anything, Nick cocked his rifle and moved cautiously forward.

He literally felt every step of the way, keeping all his senses on the alert, for he realized, as fully as could any one, to what personal danger he was exposed.

Scarcely twenty yards of comparatively level surface remained between him and the spot where the massive rocks were tumbled upon each other in the wildest confusion, and Nick Whiffles had advanced three-fourths of the way across this without detecting anything unusual, except that the dog Calamity seemed to be very uneasy.

He had remained standing like a pointer until his master had passed a few feet beyond, when he followed, but with such a hesitating step, and such manifest disapproval, that Nick's conscience caused him to turn round more than once and debate within himself whether he ought not to turn back altogether, and seek some sheltered spot where he could sudy out the field more at his own leisure.

He felt that the only reason his faithful friend changed his position was to keep him company, and protect him, if possible, from the peril that was increasing every moment.

"I s'pose I'm making a fool of myself," he thought, as he stood motionless a moment, and then started forward again, "but there allus had to be some one in the Whiffles family to make a fool of himself for the benefit of t'other ones, and I may as well be one for the benefit of myself—"

He was still moving about, and carefully advancing toward the rocks, when he suddenly stepped upon vacancy and disappeared like a flash.

Nick Whiffles fell a distance of about twenty feet into blank darkness, alighting upon his feet and receiving a severe shock. He was confused for an instant, but his shrewd intellect told him that in moving about and looking upward he had stepped into an opening, of which he had no suspicion, and which must have been used by the Modoc in going to and coming from his retreat in the mountains. With all the trapper's extensive knowledge of the ways and devilments of the Indians, it had never occurred to him that the Indian had disappeared into the ground instead of above it.

Rallying his senses, he looked about in the darkness in the effort to gain some idea of where he was. Looking upward, he could see the irregular opening over his head, through which he had just fallen, with the dog, Calamity, peering down in the gloom upon him, as if inquiring how his master had made out.

"Oh, I'm here, pup," he said, in a voice just loud enough to be heard by the brute, "and I'm shook up a considerable, but it's all the same. I guess you'd better come down here with me, fur I think I shall need your help to get out of this condemned difficulty."

He had scarcely said the words, when down came the dog, narrowly missing striking him upon the head and shoulders.

Master and dog now being together, there was need of all the wits at their command, a fact which was fully understood by both.

The trouble was that as they stood upon the hard, flat surface of the rock, they could not catch the slightest glimpse of any thing like daylight, in any direction, except by looking upward at the hole through which both had descended, but through which it was impossible to make their way again without outside assistance.

"That's what I call a rather handy style of stairs," said Nick Whiffles. "Twenty feet down at one step is inconvenient to persons with a weak constitution. It makes me think of the cellar stairs an uncle of mine once made. It was quite that style, and he said, when explaining it, that it would keep people from running down thar too often, and he wouldn't have so

much pie stolen. When his wife had to go down it didn't take her long, but it was onhandy 'bout pulling her up, as they had to let down a hook and rope, and fasten it in her back hair; but come, let us larn something instead of foolin' away our time."

It was very certain that whoever spent their time in those underground quarters did not remain around the opening, and Nick and Calamity began moving forward, groping their way along with great caution.

By stretching out his arms, the trapper found that he was following a passage some six or eight feet in width; but, as it extended in both directions, it was uncertain whether he was going toward or from the point he wished to reach. Unaware of what pitfalls might be in front, he let Calamity take the lead, knowing that the instinct of the brute was far more reliable in a case like this than the reason of man.

Perhaps fifty feet had been passed in this manner, when a slight sound reached the ears of Nick that seemed like the moan of waters; but as it instantly ceased again, he suspected that it was the voice of persons talking. He stood for several minutes listening, but not hearing it, he moved forward. By this time, he was out of sight of the opening, and look in whichever direction he chose, it was black, starless night.

A short distance further the dog uttered a faint whine, as an indication that he had discovered something. Nothing, however, could be seen, and the twain moved forward again for a few steps, when a faint lighting up showed they were approaching some sort of opening.

"I guess we're going to larn something," said Nick to his dog, as he felt that he was upon the eve of making some important discovery.

The light continued to increase as they cautiously advanced, and by-and-by he detected the glimmer of something like a fire, but he could not make certain what it was until he had penetrated some distance further, when he saw that a small wood fire was burning at one side of the cavern.

Such being the case, was proof that those who had kindled it were not far away, though Nick for a time was unable to discover them.

Still advancing with the silence and stealth of shadows, with his eyes and ears as wide open as they could be, the fire was seen to flash up suddenly, as though some one had thrown additional fuel upon it.

At this increased illumination, two figures were instantly revealed—the figures of two women—Mrs. De Long and her daughter Juliette—those for whom Marunyo and the trappers were searching.

They were strangers to Nick Whiffles, he having never set eyes on them before, but the circumstances under which he saw them could leave no doubt of their identity, and as he looked upon the beautiful face of the younger as revealed by the firelight, he could not wonder that Marunyo had fallen so hopelessly in love that he was willing to risk his life a hundred times over, for the sake of rescuing her from her dreadful captivity.

It was Juliette who had stirred the smoldering embers, and thrown some other sticks upon them, and the flame showed that the place where she and her mother stood was an expansion of the passage into something like a room, which had been fitted up as a sort of Indian lodge.

The first effort of Nick, after recognizing the two, was to ascertain whether any other Indians were in the vicinity. Looking hither and yon, he could see nothing of them, although that was no reason for supposing they were not in the immediate neighborhood.

After stirring and replenishing the fire in the manner mentioned, Juliette sat down beside her mother, upon a flat stone, and he could hear the murmur of their voices, although unable to distinguish a word.

Nick Whiffles, wrapped in impenetrable darkness, stood for fully fifteen minutes looking upon the two, and endeavoring to make certain whether he could open communication with them without giving the alarm to their jailer at the same time.

He knew that one of these Modocs had gone down the opening a few minutes in advance of him, and the question was as to what had become of him.

Finally Nick concluded to make an attempt to apprise them of his presence, and his desire to help them out of their "condemned diffikilty." He therefore moved forward until he was within a dozen yards, and just beyond their sight, when he paused.

At this very instant one of the burning fagots fell forward, and made a sudden increase of light, by the aid of which both mother and

daughter caught sight of the hunter and his dog standing near them.

Juliette gave a slight scream at sight of the stranger, and the trapper, fearful that their fright might defeat every measure looking to their rescue, called out in a cautious undertone:

"Don't be skeart; it's me, Nick Whiffles and Calamity. We've come to make a call onto yer, and ax you if you wouldn't like to take a promenade out of this condemned diffikilty, and go back to your home ag'in."

There could be no mistake about the friendliness of that voice and person, and both mother and daughter were ready to leap for joy at the knowledge that some one had come to their rescue, even though that person was a stranger to them.

Before they could more than realize the disposition of the trapper, the latter asked them, in the same guarded voice:

"Are there any red-skins close by?"

"No," answered Mrs. De Long; "you need not be afraid to come forward."

"I ain't exactly afeared of 'em except on your account. Me and Calamity kin generally manage to take care of ourselves among the varmints! but if any of 'em are hanging 'round loose it's best to know it."

As he uttered the last words, Nick Whiffles came forward by the camp-fire, and saluted the ladies with rough but genuine courtesy.

"You both look purty well," said he, as he looked from one to the other, as he gave way to his characteristic sense of humor. "If young gals want to git pale and interestin' like, thar ain't nothin' better than to keep out of the sunlight—though I think you didn't come down here of your own free will and accord. How many of the Injuns are here watchin' you?" he asked, abruptly.

"There is nearly always one here or close by, but the rest are on the outside guarding that point," replied Mrs. De Long.

"How many of them are there?"

"About half a dozen."

"Helloa!" exclaimed the surprised trapper; "I hadn't counted on finding so many as that; but there was one of the pison noosances that come down here ahead of me. What's 'come of him?"

"He was here and passed on by toward the outlet. I do not think he is within sight or hearing."

"I thought there must be some place where you could git out better than the condemned one by which I come in. It was only the good Lord that saved me from breaking my neck."

"Oh, we are so rejoiced that some one has followed us here," said the lady, devoutly. "Juliette was in despair, and I was almost; but I told her that Heaven would not forsake us, and it has not. I am so glad we are going to be rescued."

"Don't be too sartin of that," replied Nick Whiffles; "that's the business that brought me and Oregon Sol, and Marunyo here; but the thing ain't done yet, and may be it won't be done."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SURPRISING SURPRISE.

NICK WHIFFLES was uneasy because he knew that he was standing directly in front of the fire, exposed to the treacherous shot of any Modoc who might be coming in, while he was deprived of the power of returning or preventing such a shot.

Hastily explaining the position of things to the ladies, he deadened the light of the fire as much as possible, and they moved back, until he was protected by the gloom from which he had first emerged.

"Now, gals," said he, in his hasty, business-like manner, "I want to larn just how things is. How do you get out of this condemned place?"

Mrs. De Long answered the questions promptly and with intelligence.

"A hundred feet beyond the fire, the cavern opens into the outer air. The passageway is quite narrow, and night and day, there are three or four Indians on the look-out there. It is the only way by which this place can be left."

"The back door then is to come in by and not to go out. That puts the matter in a condemned bad shape, and there's going to be a diffikilty afore we kin get out. If I was only on the outside, we co'ld haul you up through the hole overhead, but as that can't be done we'll have to take the chances—hello, pup, what is it?"

He paused but a moment, when he said in a whisper, "One of the varmints is coming. I'll step back out of the way, and be keeful not to act so that they'll spect I'm about."

Nick moved a few paces further back, where there was no possibility of his being seen, and had scarcely done so, when the Modoc, who had killed the antelope, came to view, bearing in his hand some meat that had been cooked upon the outside. He threw a piece to each, and then stood with his back to the fire and his eyes fixed upon them, waiting to see them make their evening meal.

Standing thus, he offered the best target possible to Nick, who drew his rifle to his shoulder with the intention of firing, when he made a mortifying discovery that in his fall into the cavern he had struck the lock against some obstruction in such a way as to render it useless.

Calamity appeared to comprehend the mishap, and made a move as if he were anxious to dart ahead and take the place of the bullet, but his master restrained him.

The Modoc remained but a few minutes, when he turned about and sauntered away in the direction whence he came. Nick Whiffles waited until the sound of his footsteps had died out, when he came a little nigher. As he did so, Juliette moved to meet him.

"You spoke of Marunyo being with you," said she, in a timid voice; "why is he not in the cavern with you?"

"He is here."

It was the low sweet voice of Marunyo himself that uttered these words, as he walked forth from the gloom and took his place beside the astonished Nick Whiffles, and the delighted Juliette, explaining as he did so, that he had discovered the place where the trapper had made his descent, and after a careful examination of the spot he had learned the truth and had followed, without waiting to summon Oregon Sol, as he should have done.

Neither Marunyo nor Nick knew exactly where the egress from the cavern was, but, after a hasty consultation they decided to make the attempt to escape without any more delay.

The plan agreed upon was very simple. Mrs. De Long and her daughter were to move forward to the outlet, as if they had determined upon making the attempt on their own account exclusively. Upon reaching the outside of course they would be stopped by the Modocs, who would be likely to gather about them in such a way as to enable the ladies to decide how great the force was that they would have to encounter in making the rush, and if there were no more than three, Juliette was to give a signal, and her two rescuers would make a dash and overwhelm them.

If there were more than three fully armed and waiting, the captives agreed to turn back in the hope of speedily gaining a better opportunity, when the two men could take the Modocs at a greater disadvantage.

It took only a few minutes to come to an understanding, when the mother, taking the hand of her daughter, moved off in the direction taken by the Indian who had brought them their food, the trapper and Blackfoot following close behind.

A few steps only and the passage made such a curve that the light of the opening was seen. It was narrow and some dozen feet in height, opening in a slanting direction, so that it would be hard for a stranger to discover it from the outside.

Nick followed a short distance in the rear, and when they were still about twenty feet from the opening, he halted, Marunyo standing immediately behind him, with the dog at their feet, and calmly awaited the critical moment.

Juliette was slightly ahead of her mother, and as she advanced further into the dim light than the other, the two men saw one of the Modocs approach and order her to turn back. She stood parleying with him; and her mother, with the purpose of acting out her part fully, made as if to pass beyond her daughter.

At this, the Indian placed himself in the way of both and made such a threatening gesture, that they started back affrighted, fearing that he meant to strike them with the upraised tomahawk.

As yet no other Indians had appeared, and the one whom they saw before them was the same that had shot the antelope and that had passed in ahead of the rescuers.

At this instant Mrs. De Long made the signal to the latter that all was favorable.

"Shoot him down," whispered Marunyo.

Nick Whiffles raised his gun, but recollecting the mishap that had befallen it, instantly lowered it again, with the announcement that he was powerless to fire.

Marunyo then threw up his own weapon, took a quick aim and fired.

The distance was so short that he could not

miss his mark, and the Modoc, with a howl of agony, threw himself forward and fell flat upon his face, at the feet of the horrified Juliette De Long.

Calamity rushed forward to finish the red-skin, but by the time he reached him there was no necessity. The wretch was dead.

Nick and Marunyo hurried forward to close in with the other red-skin, but upon reaching the opening none was to be seen.

Both stared around in a confused way for a few minutes, and then the trapper said:

"They ain't far away; take the gals and make for the camp, while me and Calamity follow along and watch for the varmints."

The Blackfoot obeyed on the instant, not knowing how soon some of the Modocs might return, while the trapper loitered behind with the purpose of covering their retreat as much as possible.

It was already growing dark, and if their flight should remain undiscovered for a little while longer there was every prospect of making good their escape, or, at least, of securing a start which would be of incalculable advantage to them.

In a few minutes the fugitives were out of sight, and Nick found himself pushing his way along through and over the rocks, with no companion but Calamity, who had stood by him through so many "difficulties" and dangers.

"There are some difficulties which come to a feller when he ain't lookin' for 'em," said the trapper, apostrophizing his dog, "that make things all the better for their comin'. I allow that when I dropped through that hole that I got shook up considerable, and I thought it was one of them difficulties that wasn't going to help anybody along in the world; but you see how it has come out, pup. You remember me telling you about a great uncle of mine, that died on account of a difficulty in breathing, caused by a rope that got drawn too tight around his neck;—well, his going out looked like one of them things that was bad all around; but it was found arterward that on the very day he was hung, a mortgage on his house was to be foreclosed, but the man that had it went to courting the widow, and at the end of a respectable time—something like two weeks—married her, and on the whole you see it were for the best."

They were now in a dark ravine, along which they were making their way, the hunter still talking in his familiar manner with his dog, when the latter gave out his whine of warning, and the trapper paused to see what the danger was.

Nothing could be seen, look in whatsoever direction he chose, and feeling much more anxious about his friends than he did about himself, he instructed him to go on ahead and help take care of them. Calamity showed some reluctance in obeying, but nevertheless he disappeared, and Nick Whiffles continued his way along through the ravine, that was becoming denser and darker every minute.

He judged that he was still several hundred yards from camp, when he heard himself hailed.

"Stop there, my brother."

Looking up, he saw the figure of an Indian no more than a dozen feet distant, standing with his rifle pointed straight at his heart. Recalling the uselessness of his own gun, Nick felt that he was fairly caught.

"That is you, Flat-Nosed Billy," he said coolly, as he recognized his captor. "I caught you a while ago and let you off, and I s'pose you want to git me in the same difficulty and serve me the same way."

As Nick said these words he saw two or three other dark figures moving toward him, and he then felt he was caught in a trap.

"My brother must die," said Flat-Nosed Billy, eagerly, as though unable to conceal his exultation at the fortune that had placed the great hunter and trapper in his power. "He hunt no more; Modoc catch; he die!"

There was no doubt but what the devilish wretch meant to murder the man who had showed him such mercy when he had no claim to it.

"Wal, Modoc, I b'leve you've got me this time," he said, with a sigh; "they said I was a fool to let you off, when I cotched you fair and square, and there's no doubt I was. Nick Whiffles tries to live so that he's ready to go when he's sent for, and if you've made up your mind that you can't be happy without having my life, why make your aim sartin and pull the trigger—"

Crack! went the rifle, but it was not that of the Modoc. The bullet went crashing through his skull, and as he fell flat upon his face, the

well-known war-whoop of the Blackfeet was heard, uttered and repeated again and again, until it seemed that a hundred of them were plunging toward the spot.

The Modocs scattered in terror, and Nick Whiffles found himself alone. Looking around, he saw the figure of Marunyo approaching.

"Well done," exclaimed Nick, as he took his hand, and warmly pressed it; "it was well done, I say. Flat-Nosed Billy has gone under, killed by your bullet, and you give out such a big lot of yells that they thought all the Blackfeet this side of the Rocky Mountains had come down upon them, and so they cleared out. Give us your hand, and I hope you'll forgive all the uncomfortable thoughts I've had 'bout you."

"All right," said Marunyo, cheerfully; "when the dog come in, we knew something was wrong, and I started back; I got here just in time, and all is well. They are all waiting in the camp; so let us hurry."

"Is Sol there?"

"Yes; he staid to watch Drooping Lily, while I came to look for you."

"Then we'll jine them right away."

It was in the wilds of Upper California that a party of five was encamped. They had approached so near to civilization that they had dismissed all fear of pursuit or danger from the Indians. Oregon Sol and Nick Whiffles had agreed to accompany the others to San Francisco, at the request of the ladies, who insisted that they should make the acquaintance of the husband and father of those who had been in the hands of the Modocs.

Marunyo had washed the paint thoroughly from his face, and the result was the astonishing discovery that he was a white man with not a particle of Indian blood in him!

This had been known to the ladies, who had met him as a white man, and knew that he was acting as a spy in the interest of the settlers in Upper California and Oregon. His naturally swarthy complexion, black eyes and hair, and his experience in the woods, enabled him to counterfeit the Indian so completely as to deceive those people themselves. By this means, he was enabled to do more effective work for his own race.

After this revelation came a more amazing one. Oregon Sol had often noticed something in the tones of Marunyo's voice, in his looks and peculiarity of manner, that recalled his own little boy, that was stolen years before, by a party of Indians in northern Missouri, and of which he could never gain any tidings. His loss had nearly broken the heart of the mother, and the father, to kill his own grief, took to the woods.

When Sol found out that Marunyo was really a white man, he began questioning him closely, and the result was the discovery that he was in reality his long-lost son.

The joy of the father at this knowledge cannot be imagined; and he declared that he only felt one pang—which was that his wife could not have been spared to see this day—but then she was in heaven looking down upon them, and so it was all right after all.

Marunyo, the accepted lover of Juliette De Long, and now a genuine white man, gave up the wild life of the woods, and became a thoroughly civilized being, the happiest of men, when he was enabled to call the beautiful girl his own—his cherished wife.

Nick Whiffles and Oregon Sol were urged to make their home with them; but they had ranged the woods so long, that it had become second nature to them, and they continued their hunting and trapping, in the great North-west, sometimes penetrating into Hudson Bay Territory, and returning at regular intervals to visit and spend a few days with the son and husband, who has figured in these pages as the INDIAN SPY.

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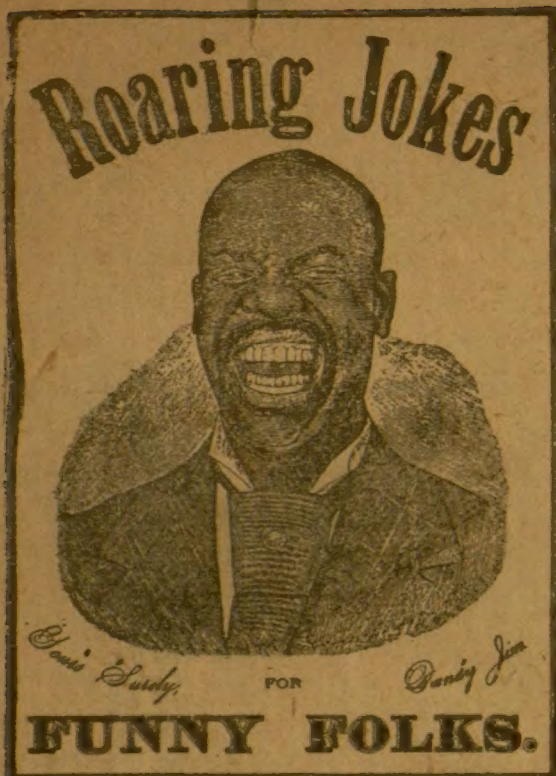
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